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NANA

CHAPTER I

AT NINE O'CLOCK in the evening the body of the house at the Théâtres des Variétés was still all but empty. A few individuals, it is true, were sitting quietly waiting in the balcony and stalls, but these were lost, as it were, among the ranges of seats whose coverings of cardinal velvet loomed in the subdued light of the dimly burning luster. A shadow enveloped the great red splash of the curtain, and not a sound came from the stage, the unlit footlights, the scattered desks of the orchestra. It was only high overhead in the third gallery, round the domed ceiling where nude females and children flew in heavens which had turned green in the gaslight, that calls and laughter were audible above a continuous hubbub of voices, and heads in women's and workmen's caps were ranged, row above row, under the wide-vaulted bays with their gilt-surrounding adornments. Every few seconds an attendant would make her appearance, bustling along with tickets in her hand and piloting in front of her a gentleman and a lady, who took their seats, he in his evening dress, she sitting slim and undulant beside him while her eyes wandered slowly round the house.

Two young men appeared in the stalls; they kept standing and looked about them.

"Didn't I say so, Hector?" cried the elder of the two, a tall fellow with little black mustaches. "We're too early! You might quite well have allowed me to finish my cigar."

An attendant was passing.

"Oh, Monsieur Fauchery," she said familiarly, "it won't begin for half an hour yet!"

"Then why do they advertise for nine o'clock?" muttered Hector, whose long thin face assumed an expression of vexation. "Only this morning Clarisse, who's in the piece, swore that they'd begin at nine o'clock punctually."

For a moment they remained silent and, looking upward, scanned the shadowy boxes. But the green paper with which these were hung rendered them more shadowy still. Down below, under the dress circle, the lower boxes were buried in utter night. In those on the second tier there was only one stout lady, who was stranded, as it were, on the velvet-covered balustrade in front of her. On the right hand and on the left, between lofty pilasters, the stage boxes, bedraped with long-fringed scalloped hangings, remained untenanted. The house with its white and gold, relieved by soft green tones, lay only half disclosed to view, as though full of a fine dust shed from the little jets of flame in the great glass luster.

"Did you get your stage box for Lucy?" asked Hector.

"Yes," replied his companion, "but I had some trouble to get it. Oh, there's no danger of Lucy coming too early!"

He stifled a slight yawn; then after a pause:

"You're in luck's way, you are, since you haven't been at a first night before. The *Blonde Venus* will be the event of the year. People have been talking about it for six months. Oh, such music, my dear boy! Such a sly dog,

a deuce of a row going on in his shop, which had been turned topsy-turvy by that big damsel's advent. Rose Mignon, his star, a comic actress of much subtlety and an adorable singer, was daily threatening to leave him in the lurch, for she was furious and guessed the presence of a rival. And as for the bill, good God! What a noise there had been about it all! It had ended by his deciding to print the names of the two actresses in the same-sized type. But it wouldn't do to bother him. Whenever any of his little women, as he called them—Simonne or Clarisse, for instance—wouldn't go the way he wanted her to he just up with his foot and caught her one in the rear. Otherwise life was impossible. Oh yes, he sold 'em; *he* knew what they fetched, the wenches!

"Tut!" he cried, breaking off short. "Mignon and Steiner. Always together. You know, Steiner's getting sick of Rose; that's why the husband dogs his steps now for fear of his slipping away."

On the pavement outside, the row of gas jets flaring on the cornice of the theater cast a patch of brilliant light. Two small trees, violently green, stood sharply out against it, and a column gleamed in such vivid illumination that one could read the notices thereon at a distance, as though in broad daylight, while the dense night of the boulevard beyond was dotted with lights above the vague outline of an ever-moving crowd. Many men did not enter the theater at once but stayed outside to talk while finishing their cigars under the rays of the line of gas jets, which shed a sallow pallor on their faces and silhouetted their short black shadows on the asphalt. Mignon, a very tall, very broad fellow, with the square-shaped head of a strong man at a fair, was forcing a passage through the midst of the groups and dragging on his arm the banker Steiner, an exceedingly small man with a corporation already in evidence and a round face framed in a setting of beard which was already growing gray.

"Well," said Bordenave to the banker, "you met her yesterday in my office."

"Ah! It was she, was it?" ejaculated Steiner. "I suspected as much. Only I was coming out as she was going in, and I scarcely caught a glimpse of her."

Mignon was listening with half-closed eyelids and nervously twisting a great diamond ring round his finger. He had quite understood that Nana was in question. Then as Bordenave was drawing a portrait of his new star, which lit a flame in the eyes of the banker, he ended by joining in the conversation.

"Oh, let her alone, my dear fellow; she's a low lot! The public will show her the door in quick time. Steiner, my laddie, you know that my wife is waiting for you in her box."

He wanted to take possession of him again. But Steiner would not quit Bordenave. In front of them a stream of people was crowding and crushing against the ticket office, and there was a din of voices, in the midst of which the name of Nana sounded with all the melodious vivacity of its two syllables. The men who stood planted in front of the notices kept spelling it out loudly; others, in an interrogative tone, uttered it as they passed; while the women, at once restless and smiling, repeated it softly with an air of surprise. Nobody knew Nana. Whence had Nana fallen? And stories and jokes, whispered from ear to ear, went the round of the crowd. The name was a caress in itself; it was

a pet name, the very familiarity of which suited every lip. Merely through enunciating it thus, the throng worked itself into a state of gaiety and became highly good natured. A fever of curiosity urged it forward, that kind of Parisian curiosity which is as violent as an access of positive unreason. Everybody wanted to see Nana. A lady had the flounce of her dress torn off; a man lost his hat.

"Oh, you're asking me too many questions about it!" cried Bordenave, whom a score of men were besieging with their queries. "You're going to see her, and I'm off; they want me."

He disappeared, enchanted at having fired his public. Mignon shrugged his shoulders, reminding Steiner that Rose was awaiting him in order to show him the costume she was about to wear in the first act.

"By Jove! There's Lucy out there, getting down from her carriage," said La Faloise to Fauchery.

It was, in fact, Lucy Stewart, a plain little woman, some forty years old, with a disproportionately long neck, a thin, drawn face, a heavy mouth, but withal of such brightness, such graciousness of manner, that she was really very charming. She was bringing with her Caroline Héquet and her mother—Caroline a woman of a cold type of beauty, the mother a person of a most worthy demeanor, who looked as if she were stuffed with straw.

"You're coming with us? I've kept a place for you," she said to Fauchery.

"Oh, decidedly not! To see nothing!" he made answer. "I've a stall; I prefer being in the stalls."

Lucy grew nettled. Did he not dare show himself in her company? Then, suddenly restraining herself and skipping to another topic:

"Why haven't you told me that you knew Nana?"

"Nana! I've never set eyes on her."

"Honor bright? I've been told that you've been to bed with her."

But Mignon, coming in front of them, his finger to his lips, made them a sign to be silent. And when Lucy questioned him he pointed out a young man who was passing and murmured:

"Nana's fancy man."

Everybody looked at him. He was a pretty fellow. Fauchery recognized him; it was Daguenet, a young man who had run through three hundred thousand francs in the pursuit of women and who now was dabbling in stocks, in order from time to time to treat them to bouquets and dinners. Lucy made the discovery that he had fine eyes.

"Ah, there's Blanche!" she cried. "It's she who told me that you had been to bed with Nana."

Blanche de Sivry, a great fair girl, whose good-looking face showed signs of growing fat, made her appearance in the company of a spare, sedulously well-groomed and extremely distinguished man.

"The Count Xavier de Vandeuvres," Fauchery whispered in his companion's ear.

The count and the journalist shook hands, while Blanche and Lucy entered into a brisk, mutual explanation. One of them in blue, the other in rose-pink,

they stood blocking the way with their deeply flounced skirts, and Nana's name kept repeating itself so shrilly in their conversation that people began to listen to them. The Count de Vandeuvres carried Blanche off. But by this time Nana's name was echoing more loudly than ever round the four walls of the entrance hall amid yearnings sharpened by delay. Why didn't the play begin? The men pulled out their watches; late-comers sprang from their conveyances before these had fairly drawn up; the groups left the sidewalk, where the passers-by were crossing the now-vacant space of gaslit pavement, craning their necks, as they did so, in order to get a peep into the theater. A street boy came up whistling and planted himself before a notice at the door, then cried out, "Woa, Nana!" in the voice of a tipsy man and hied on his way with a rolling gait and a shuffling of his old boots. A laugh had arisen at this. Gentlemen of unimpeachable appearance repeated: "Nana, woa, Nana!" People were crushing; a dispute arose at the ticket office, and there was a growing clamor caused by the hum of voices calling on Nana, demanding Nana in one of those accesses of silly facetiousness and sheer animalism which pass over mobs.

But above all the din the bell that precedes the rise of the curtain became audible. "They've rung; they've rung!" The rumor reached the boulevard, and thereupon followed a stampede, everyone wanting to pass in, while the servants of the theater increased their forces. Mignon, with an anxious air, at last got hold of Steiner again, the latter not having been to see Rose's costume. At the very first tinkle of the bell La Faloise had cloven a way through the crowd, pulling Fauchery with him, so as not to miss the opening scene. But all this eagerness on the part of the public irritated Lucy Stewart. What brutes were these people to be pushing women like that! She stayed in the rear of them all with Caroline Héquet and her mother. The entrance hall was now empty, while beyond it was still heard the long-drawn rumble of the boulevard.

"As though they were always funny, those pieces of theirs!" Lucy kept repeating as she climbed the stair.

In the house Fauchery and La Faloise, in front of their stalls, were gazing about them anew. By this time the house was resplendent. High jets of gas illumined the great glass chandelier with a rustling of yellow and rosy flames, which rained down a stream of brilliant light from dome to floor. The cardinal velvets of the seats were shot with hues of lake, while all the gilding shone again, the soft green decorations chastening its effect beneath the too-decided paintings of the ceiling. The footlights were turned up and with a vivid flood of brilliance lit up the curtain, the heavy purple drapery of which had all the richness befitting a palace in a fairy tale and contrasted with the meanness of the proscenium, where cracks showed the plaster under the gilding. The place was already warm. At their music stands the orchestra were tuning their instruments amid a delicate trilling of flutes, a stifled tooting of horns, a singing of violin notes, which floated forth amid the increasing uproar of voices. All the spectators were talking, jostling, settling themselves in a general assault upon seats; and the hustling rush in the side passages was now so violent that every door into the house was laboriously admitting the inexhaustible flood

of people. There were signals, rustlings of fabrics, a continual march past of skirts and head dresses, accentuated by the black hue of a dress coat or a sur-tout. Notwithstanding this, the rows of seats were little by little getting filled up, while here and there a light toilet stood out from its surroundings, a head with a delicate profile bent forward under its chignon, where flashed the lightning of a jewel. In one of the boxes the tip of a bare shoulder glimmered like snowy silk. Other ladies, sitting at ease, languidly fanned themselves, following with their gaze the pushing movements of the crowd, while young gentlemen, standing up in the stalls, their waistcoats cut very low, gardenias in their buttonholes, pointed their opera glasses with gloved finger tips.

It was now that the two cousins began searching for the faces of those they knew. Mignon and Steiner were together in a lower box, sitting side by side with their arms leaning for support on the velvet balustrade. Blanche de Sivry seemed to be in sole possession of a stage box on the level of the stalls. But La Faloise examined Dagueneu before anyone else, he being in occupation of a stall two rows in front of his own. Close to him, a very young man, seventeen years old at the outside, some truant from college, it may be, was straining wide a pair of fine eyes such as a cherub might have owned. Fauchery smiled when he looked at him.

"Who is that lady in the balcony?" La Faloise asked suddenly. "The lady with a young girl in blue beside her."

He pointed out a large woman who was excessively tight-laced, a woman who had been a blonde and had now become white and yellow of tint, her broad face, reddened with paint, looking puffy under a rain of little childish curls.

"It's Gaga," was Fauchery's simple reply, and as this name seemed to astound his cousin, he added:

"You don't know Gaga? She was the delight of the early years of Louis Philippe. Nowadays she drags her daughter about with her wherever she goes."

La Faloise never once glanced at the young girl. The sight of Gaga moved him; his eyes did not leave her again. He still found her very good looking but he dared not say so.

Meanwhile the conductor lifted his violin bow and the orchestra attacked the overture. People still kept coming in; the stir and noise were on the increase. Among that public, peculiar to first nights and never subject to change, there were little subsections composed of intimate friends, who smilingly forgathered again. Old first-nighters, hat on head, seemed familiar and quite at ease and kept exchanging salutations. All Paris was there, the Paris of literature, of finance and of pleasure. There were many journalists, several authors, a number of stock-exchange people and more courtesans than honest women. It was a singularly mixed world, composed, as it was, of all the talents and tarnished by all the vices, a world where the same fatigue and the same fever played over every face. Fauchery, whom his cousin was questioning, showed him the boxes devoted to the newspapers and to the clubs and then named the dramatic critics—a lean, dried-up individual with thin, spiteful lips and, chief of all, a

big fellow with a good-natured expression, lolling on the shoulder of his neighbor, a young miss over whom he brooded with tender and paternal eyes.

But he interrupted himself on seeing La Faloise in the act of bowing to some persons who occupied the box opposite. He appeared surprised.

"What?" he queried. "You know the Count Muffat de Beuville?"

"Oh, for a long time back," replied Hector. "The Muffats had a property near us. I often go to their house. The count's with his wife and his father-in-law, the Marquis de Chouard."

And with some vanity—for he was happy in his cousin's astonishment—he entered into particulars. The marquis was a councilor of state; the count had recently been appointed chamberlain to the empress. Fauchery, who had caught up his opera glass, looked at the countess, a plump brunette with a white skin and fine dark eyes.

"You shall present me to them between the acts," he ended by saying. "I have already met the count, but I should like to go to them on their Tuesdays."

Energetic cries of "Hush" came from the upper galleries. The overture had begun, but people were still coming in. Late arrivals were obliging whole rows of spectators to rise; the doors of boxes were banging; loud voices were heard disputing in the passages. And there was no cessation of the sound of many conversations, a sound similar to the loud twittering of talkative sparrows at close of day. All was in confusion; the house was a medley of heads and arms which moved to and fro, their owners seating themselves or trying to make themselves comfortable or, on the other hand, excitedly endeavoring to remain standing so as to take a final look round. The cry of "Sit down, sit down!" came fiercely from the obscure depths of the pit. A shiver of expectation traversed the house: at last people were going to make the acquaintance of this famous Nana with whom Paris had been occupying itself for a whole week!

Little by little, however, the buzz of talk dwindled softly down among occasional fresh outbursts of rough speech. And amid this swooning murmur, these perishing sighs of sound, the orchestra struck up the small, lively notes of a waltz with a vagabond rhythm bubbling with roguish laughter. The public were titillated; they were already on the grin. But the gang of clappers in the foremost rows of the pit applauded furiously. The curtain rose.

"By George!" exclaimed La Faloise, still talking away. "There's a man with Lucy."

He was looking at the stage box on the second tier to his right, the front of which Caroline and Lucy were occupying. At the back of this box were observable the worthy countenance of Caroline's mother and the side face of a tall young man with a noble head of light hair and an irreproachable getup.

"Do look!" La Faloise again insisted. "There's a man there."

Fauchery decided to level his opera glass at the stage box. But he turned round again directly.

"Oh, it's Labordette," he muttered in a careless voice, as though that gentleman's presence ought to strike all the world as though both natural and immaterial.

Behind the cousins people shouted "Silence!" They had to cease talking. A

motionless fit now seized the house, and great stretches of heads, all erect and attentive, sloped away from stalls to topmost gallery. The first act of the *Blonde Venus* took place in Olympus, a pasteboard Olympus, with clouds in the wings and the throne of Jupiter on the right of the stage. First of all Iris and Gany-mede, aided by a troupe of celestial attendants, sang a chorus while they arranged the seats of the gods for the council. Once again the prearranged applause of the clappers alone burst forth; the public, a little out of their depth, sat waiting. Nevertheless, La Faloise had clapped Clarisse Besnus, one of Bordenave's little women, who played Iris in a soft blue dress with a great scarf of the seven colors of the rainbow looped round her waist.

"You know, she draws up her chemise to put that on," he said to Fauchery, loud enough to be heard by those around him. "We tried the trick this morning. It was all up under her arms and round the small of her back."

But a slight rustling movement ran through the house; Rose Mignon had just come on the stage as Diana. Now though she had neither the face nor the figure for the part, being thin and dark and of the adorable type of ugliness peculiar to a Parisian street child, she nonetheless appeared charming and as though she were a satire on the personage she represented. Her song at her entrance on the stage was full of lines quaint enough to make you cry with laughter and of complaints about Mars, who was getting ready to desert her for the companionship of Venus. She sang it with a chaste reserve so full of sprightly suggestiveness that the public warmed amain. The husband and Steiner, sitting side by side, were laughing complaisantly, and the whole house broke out in a roar when Prulli re, that great favorite, appeared as a general, a masquerade Mars, decked with an enormous plume and dragging along a sword, the hilt of which reached to his shoulder. As for him, he had had enough of Diana; she had been a great deal too coy with him, he averred. Thereupon Diana promised to keep a sharp eye on him and to be revenged. The duet ended with a comic yodel which Prulli re delivered very amusingly with the yell of an angry tomcat. He had about him all the entertaining fatuity of a young leading gentleman whose love affairs prosper, and he rolled around the most swaggering glances, which excited shrill feminine laughter in the boxes.

Then the public cooled again, for the ensuing scenes were found tiresome. Old Bosc, an imbecile Jupiter with head crushed beneath the weight of an immense crown, only just succeeded in raising a smile among his audience when he had a domestic altercation with Juno on the subject of the cook's accounts. The march past of the gods, Neptune, Pluto, Minerva and the rest, was well-nigh spoiling everything. People grew impatient; there was a restless, slowly growing murmur; the audience ceased to take an interest in the performance and looked round at the house. Lucy began laughing with Labor-dette; the Count de Vandevvres was craning his neck in conversation behind Blanche's sturdy shoulders, while Fauchery, out of the corners of his eyes, took stock of the Muffats, of whom the count appeared very serious, as though he had not understood the allusions, and the countess smiled vaguely, her eyes lost in reverie. But on a sudden, in this uncomfortable state of things, the applause of the clapping contingent rattled out with the regularity of platoon

firing. People turned toward the stage. Was it Nana at last? This Nana made one wait with a vengeance.

It was a deputation of mortals whom Ganymede and Iris had introduced, respectable middle-class persons, deceived husbands, all of them, and they came before the master of the gods to proffer a complaint against Venus, who was assuredly inflaming their good ladies with an excess of ardor. The chorus, in quaint, dolorous tones, broken by silences full of pantomimic admissions, caused great amusement. A neat phrase went the round of the house: "The cuckolds' chorus, the cuckolds' chorus," and it "caught on," for there was an encore. The singers' heads were droll; their faces were discovered to be in keeping with the phrase, especially that of a fat man which was as round as the moon. Meanwhile Vulcan arrived in a towering rage, demanding back his wife who had slipped away three days ago. The chorus resumed their plaint, calling on Vulcan, the god of the cuckolds. Vulcan's part was played by Fontan, a comic actor of talent, at once vulgar and original, and he had a role of the wildest whimsicality and was got up as a village blacksmith, fiery red wig, bare arms tattooed with arrow-pierced hearts and all the rest of it. A woman's voice cried in a very high key, "Oh, isn't he ugly?" and all the ladies laughed and applauded.

Then followed a scene which seemed interminable. Jupiter in the course of it seemed never to be going to finish assembling the Council of Gods in order to submit thereto the deceived husband's requests. And still no Nana! Was the management keeping Nana for the fall of the curtain then? So long a period of expectancy had ended by annoying the public. Their murmurings began again.

"It's going badly," said Mignon radiantly to Steiner. "She'll get a pretty reception; you'll see!"

At that very moment the clouds at the back of the stage were cloven apart and Venus appeared. Exceedingly tall, exceedingly strong, for her eighteen years, Nana, in her goddess's white tunic and with her light hair simply flowing unfastened over her shoulders, came down to the footlights with a quiet certainty of movement and a laugh of greeting for the public and struck up her grand ditty:

"When Venus roams at eventide."

From the second verse onward people looked at each other all over the house. Was this some jest, some wager on Bordenave's part? Never had a more tuneless voice been heard or one managed with less art. Her manager judged of her excellently; she certainly sang like a squirt. Nay, more, she didn't even know how to deport herself on the stage: she thrust her arms in front of her while she swayed her whole body to and fro in a manner which struck the audience as unbecoming and disagreeable. Cries of "Oh, oh!" were already rising in the pit and the cheap places. There was a sound of whistling, too, when a voice in the stalls, suggestive of a molting cockerel, cried out with great conviction:

"That's very smart!"

All the house looked round. It was the cherub, the truant from the board-

ingschool, who sat with his fine eyes very wide open and his fair face glowing very hotly at sight of Nana. When he saw everybody turning toward him he grew extremely red at the thought of having thus unconsciously spoken aloud. Daguenet, his neighbor, smilingly examined him; the public laughed, as though disarmed and no longer anxious to hiss; while the young gentlemen in white gloves, fascinated in their turn by Nana's gracious contours, lolled back in their seats and applauded.

"That's it! Well done! Bravo!"

Nana, in the meantime, seeing the house laughing, began to laugh herself. The gaiety of all redoubled itself. She was an amusing creature, all the same, was that fine girl! Her laughter made a love of a little dimple appear in her chin. She stood there waiting, not bored in the least, familiar with her audience, falling into step with them at once, as though she herself were admitting with a wink that she had not two farthings' worth of talent but that it did not matter at all, that, in fact, she had other good points. And then after having made a sign to the conductor which plainly signified, "Go ahead, old boy!" she began her second verse:

"'Tis Venus who at midnight passes—"

Still the same acidulated voice, only that now it tickled the public in the right quarter so deftly that momentarily it caused them to give a little shiver of pleasure. Nana still smiled her smile: it lit up her little red mouth and shone in her great eyes, which were of the clearest blue. When she came to certain rather lively verses a delicate sense of enjoyment made her tilt her nose, the rosy nostrils of which lifted and fell, while a bright flush suffused her cheeks. She still swung herself up and down, for she only knew how to do that. And the trick was no longer voted ugly; on the contrary, the men raised their opera glasses. When she came to the end of a verse her voice completely failed her, and she was well aware that she never would get through with it. Thereupon, rather than fret herself, she kicked up her leg, which forthwith was roundly outlined under her diaphanous tunic, bent sharply backward, so that her bosom was thrown upward and forward, and stretched her arms out. Applause burst forth on all sides. In the twinkling of an eye she had turned on her heel and was going up the stage, presenting the nape of her neck to the spectators' gaze, a neck where the red-gold hair showed like some animal's fell. Then the plaudits became frantic.

The close of the act was not so exciting. Vulcan wanted to slap Venus. The gods held a consultation and decided to go and hold an inquiry on earth before granting the deceived husband satisfaction. It was then that Diana surprised a tender conversation between Venus and Mars and vowed that she would not take her eyes off them during the whole of the voyage. There was also a scene where Love, played by a little twelve-year-old chit, answered every question put to her with "Yes, Mamma! No, Mamma!" in a winy-piny tone, her fingers in her nose. At last Jupiter, with the severity of a master who is growing cross, shut Love up in a dark closet, bidding her conjugate the verb "I love"

twenty times. The finale was more appreciated: it was a chorus which both troupe and orchestra performed with great brilliancy. But the curtain once down, the clappers tried in vain to obtain a call, while the whole house was already up and making for the doors.

The crowd trampled and jostled, jammed, as it were, between the rows of seats, and in so doing exchanged expressions. One phrase only went round: "It's idiotic." A critic was saying that it would be one's duty to do a pretty bit of slashing. The piece, however, mattered very little, for people were talking about Nana before everything else. Fauchery and La Faloise, being among the earliest to emerge, met Steiner and Mignon in the passage outside the stalls. In this gaslit gut of a place, which was as narrow and circumscribed as a gallery in a mine, one was well-nigh suffocated. They stopped a moment at the foot of the stairs on the right of the house, protected by the final curve of the balusters. The audience from the cheap places were coming down the steps with a continuous tramp of heavy boots; a stream of black dress coats was passing, while an attendant was making every possible effort to protect a chair, on which she had piled up coats and cloaks, from the onward pushing of the crowd.

"Surely I know her," cried Steiner, the moment he perceived Fauchery. "I'm certain I've seen her somewhere—at the casino, I imagine, and she got herself taken up there—she was so drunk."

"As for me," said the journalist, "I don't quite know where it was. I am like you; I certainly have come across her."

He lowered his voice and asked, laughing:

"At the Tricons', perhaps."

"Egad, it was in a dirty place," Mignon declared. He seemed exasperated. "It's disgusting that the public give such a reception to the first trollop that comes by. There'll soon be no more decent women on the stage. Yes, I shall end by forbidding Rose to play."

Fauchery could not restrain a smile. Meanwhile the downward shuffle of the heavy shoes on the steps did not cease, and a little man in a workman's cap was heard crying in a drawling voice:

"Oh my, she ain't no wopper! There's some pickings there!"

In the passage two young men, delicately curled and formally resplendent in turndown collars and the rest, were disputing together. One of them was repeating the words, "Beastly, beastly!" without stating any reasons; the other was replying with the words, "Stunning, stunning!" as though he, too, disdained all argument.

La Faloise declared her to be quite the thing; only he ventured to opine that she would be better still if she were to cultivate her voice. Steiner, who was no longer listening, seemed to awake with a start. Whatever happens, one must wait, he thought. Perhaps everything will be spoiled in the following acts. The public had shown complaisance, but it was certainly not yet taken by storm. Mignon swore that the piece would never finish, and when Fauchery and La Faloise left them in order to go up to the foyer he took Steiner's arm and, leaning hard against his shoulder, whispered in his ear:

"You're going to see my wife's costume for the second act, old fellow. It is just blackguardly."

Upstairs in the foyer three glass chandeliers burned with a brilliant light. The two cousins hesitated an instant before entering, for the widely opened glazed doors afforded a view right through the gallery—a view of a surging sea of heads, which two currents, as it were, kept in a continuous eddying movement. But they entered after all. Five or six groups of men, talking very loudly and gesticulating, were obstinately discussing the play amid these violent interruptions; others were filing round, their heels, as they turned, sounding sharply on the waxed floor. To right and left, between columns of variegated imitation marble, women were sitting on benches covered with red velvet and viewing the passing movement of the crowd with an air of fatigue as though the heat had rendered them languid. In the lofty mirrors behind them one saw the reflection of their chignons. At the end of the room, in front of the bar, a man with a huge corporation was drinking a glass of fruit syrup.

But Fauchery, in order to breathe more freely, had gone to the balcony. La Faloise, who was studying the photographs of actresses hung in frames alternating with the mirrors between the columns, ended by following him. They had extinguished the line of gas jets on the façade of the theater, and it was dark and very cool on the balcony, which seemed to them unoccupied. Solitary and enveloped in shadow, a young man was standing, leaning his arms on the stone balustrade, in the recess to the right. He was smoking a cigarette, of which the burning end shone redly. Fauchery recognized Daguenet. They shook hands warmly.

"What are you after there, my dear fellow?" asked the journalist. "You're hiding yourself in holes and crannies—you, a man who never leaves the stalls on a first night!"

"But I'm smoking, you see," replied Daguenet.

Then Fauchery, to put him out of countenance:

"Well, well! What's your opinion of the new actress? She's being roughly handled enough in the passages."

"Bah!" muttered Daguenet. "They're people whom she'll have had nothing to do with!"

That was the sum of his criticism of Nana's talent. La Faloise leaned forward and looked down at the boulevard. Over against them the windows of a hotel and of a club were brightly lit up, while on the pavement below a dark mass of customers occupied the tables of the Café de Madrid. Despite the lateness of the hour the crowd were still crushing and being crushed; people were advancing with shortened step; a throng was constantly emerging from the Passage Jouffroy; individuals stood waiting five or six minutes before they could cross the roadway, to such a distance did the string of carriages extend.

"What a moving mass! And what a noise!" La Faloise kept reiterating, for Paris still astonished him.

The bell rang for some time; the foyer emptied. There was a hurrying of people in the passages. The curtain was already up when whole bands of spectators re-entered the house amid the irritated expressions of those who

were once more in their places. Everyone took his seat again with an animated look and renewed attention. La Faloise directed his first glance in Gaga's direction, but he was dumfounded at seeing by her side the tall fair man who but recently had been in Lucy's stage box.

"What is that man's name?" he asked.

Fauchery failed to observe him.

"Ah yes, it's Labordette," he said at last with the same careless movement.

The scenery of the second act came as a surprise. It represented a suburban Shrove Tuesday dance at the Boule Noire. Masqueraders were trolling a catch, the chorus of which was accompanied with a tapping of their heels. This 'Arryish departure, which nobody had in the least expected, caused so much amusement that the house encored the catch. And it was to this entertainment that the divine band, let astray by Iris, who falsely bragged that he knew the Earth well, were now come in order to proceed with their inquiry. They had put on disguises so as to preserve their incognito. Jupiter came on the stage as King Dagobert, with his breeches inside out and a huge tin crown on his head. Phoebus appeared as the Postillion of Lonjumeau and Minerva as a Norman nursemaid. Loud bursts of merriment greeted Mars, who wore an outrageous uniform, suggestive of an Alpine admiral. But the shouts of laughter became uproarious when Neptune came in view, clad in a blouse, a high, bulging workman's cap on his head, lovelocks glued to his temples. Shuffling along in slippers, he cried in a thick brogue:

"Well, I'm blessed! When ye're a masher it'll never do not to let 'em love yer!"

There were some shouts of "Oh! Oh!" while the ladies held their fans one degree higher. Lucy in her stage box laughed so obstreperously that Caroline Héquet silenced her with a tap of her fan.

From that moment forth the piece was saved—nay, more, promised a great success. This carnival of the gods, this dragging in the mud of their Olympus, this mock at a whole religion, a whole world of poetry, appeared in the light of a royal entertainment. The fever of irreverence gained the literary first-night world: legend was trampled underfoot; ancient images were shattered. Jupiter's make-up was capital. Mars was a success. Royalty became a farce and the army a thing of folly. When Jupiter, grown suddenly amorous of a little laundress, began to knock off a mad cancan, Simonne, who was playing the part of the laundress, launched a kick at the master of the immortals' nose and addressed him so drolly as "My big daddy!" that an immoderate fit of laughter shook the whole house. While they were dancing Phoebus treated Minerva to salad bowls of negus, and Neptune sat in state among seven or eight women who regaled him with cakes. Allusions were eagerly caught; indecent meanings were attached to them; harmless phrases were diverted from their proper significations in the light of exclamations issuing from the stalls. For a long time past the theatrical public had not wallowed in folly more irreverent. It rested them.

Nevertheless, the action of the piece advanced amid these fooleries. Vulcan, as an elegant young man clad, down to his gloves, entirely in yellow and with

an eyeglass stuck in his eye, was forever running after Venus, who at last made her appearance as a fishwife, a kerchief on her head and her bosom, covered with big gold trinkets, in great evidence. Nana was so white and plump and looked so natural in a part demanding wide hips and a voluptuous mouth that she straightway won the whole house. On her account Rose Mignon was forgotten, though she was made up as a delicious baby, with a wicker-work burlet on her head and a short muslin frock and had just sighed forth Diana's plaints in a sweetly pretty voice. The other one, the big wench who slapped her thighs and clucked like a hen, shed round her an odor of life, a sovereign feminine charm, with which the public grew intoxicated. From the second act onward everything was permitted her. She might hold herself awkwardly; she might fail to sing some note in tune; she might forget her words—it mattered not: she had only to turn and laugh to raise shouts of applause. When she gave her famous kick from the hip the stalls were fired, and a glow of passion rose upward, upward, from gallery to gallery, till it reached the gods. It was a triumph, too, when she led the dance. She was at home in that: hand on hip, she enthroned Venus in the gutter by the pavement side. And the music seemed made for her plebeian voice—shrill, piping music, with reminiscences of Saint-Cloud Fair, wheezings of clarinets and playful trills on the part of the little flutes.

Two numbers were again encored. The opening waltz, that waltz with the naughty rhythmic beat, had returned and swept the gods with it. Juno, as a peasant woman, caught Jupiter and his little laundress cleverly and boxed his ears. Diana, surprising Venus in the act of making an assignation with Mars, made haste to indicate hour and place to Vulcan, who cried, "I've hit on a plan!" The rest of the act did not seem very clear. The inquiry ended in a final gallop after which Jupiter, breathless, streaming with perspiration and minus his crown, declared that the little women of Earth were delicious and that the men were all to blame.

The curtain was falling, when certain voices, rising above the storm of bravos, cried uproariously:

"All! All!"

Thereupon the curtain rose again; the artistes reappeared hand in hand. In the middle of the line Nana and Rose Mignon stood side by side, bowing and curtsying. The audience applauded; the clappers shouted acclamations. Then little by little the house emptied.

"I must go and pay my respects to the Countess Muffat," said La Faloise.

"Exactly so; you'll present me," replied Fauchery; "we'll go down afterward."

But it was not easy to get to the first-tier boxes. In the passage at the top of the stairs there was a crush. In order to get forward at all among the various groups you had to make yourself small and to slide along, using your elbows in so doing. Leaning under a copper lamp, where a jet of gas was burning, the bulky critic was sitting in judgment on the piece in presence of an attentive circle. People in passing mentioned his name to each other in muttered tones. He had laughed the whole act through—that was the humor going the round

of the passages—nevertheless, he was now very severe and spoke of taste and morals. Farther off the thin-lipped critic was brimming over with a benevolence which had an unpleasant aftertaste, as of milk turned sour.

Fauchery glanced along, scrutinizing the boxes through the round openings in each door. But the Count de Vandevres stopped him with a question, and when he was informed that the two cousins were going to pay their respects to the Muffats, he pointed out to them box seven, from which he had just emerged. Then bending down and whispering in the journalist's ear:

"Tell me, my dear fellow," he said, "this Nana—surely she's the girl we saw one evening at the corner of the Rue de Provence?"

"By Jove, you're right!" cried Fauchery. "I was saying that I had come across her!"

La Faloise presented his cousin to Count Muffat de Beuville, who appeared very frigid. But on hearing the name Fauchery the countess raised her head and with a certain reserve complimented the paragraphist on his articles in the *Figaro*. Leaning on the velvet-covered support in front of her, she turned half round with a pretty movement of the shoulders. They talked for a short time, and the Universal Exhibition was mentioned.

"It will be very fine," said the count, whose square-cut, regular-featured face retained a certain gravity.

"I visited the Champ de Mars today and returned thence truly astonished."

"They say that things won't be ready in time," La Faloise ventured to remark. "There's infinite confusion there——"

But the count interrupted him in his severe voice:

"Things will be ready. The emperor desires it."

Fauchery gaily recounted how one day, when he had gone down thither in search of a subject for an article, he had come near spending all his time in the aquarium, which was then in course of construction. The countess smiled. Now and again she glanced down at the body of the house, raising an arm which a white glove covered to the elbow and fanning herself with languid hand. The house dozed, almost deserted. Some gentlemen in the stalls had opened out newspapers, and ladies received visits quite comfortably, as though they were at their own homes. Only a well-bred whispering was audible under the great chandelier, the light of which was softened in the fine cloud of dust raised by the confused movements of the interval. At the different entrances men were crowding in order to talk to ladies who remained seated. They stood there motionless for a few seconds, craning forward somewhat and displaying the great white bosoms of their shirt fronts.

"We count on you next Tuesday," said the countess to La Faloise, and she invited Fauchery, who bowed.

Not a word was said of the play; Nana's name was not once mentioned. The count was so glacially dignified that he might have been supposed to be taking part at a sitting of the legislature. In order to explain their presence that evening he remarked simply that his father-in-law was fond of the theater. The door of the box must have remained open, for the Marquis de Chouard, who had gone out in order to leave his seat to the visitors, was back again. He

was straightening up his tall, old figure. His face looked soft and white under a broad-brimmed hat, and with his restless eyes he followed the movements of the women who passed.

The moment the countess had given her invitation Fauchery took his leave, feeling that to talk about the play would not be quite the thing. La Faloise was the last to quit the box. He had just noticed the fair-haired Labordette, comfortably installed in the Count de Vandevres's stage box and chatting at very close quarters with Blanche de Sivry.

"Gad," he said after rejoining his cousin, "that Labordette knows all the girls then! He's with Blanche now."

"Doubtless he knows them all," replied Fauchery quietly. "What d'you want to be taken for, my friend?"

The passage was somewhat cleared of people, and Fauchery was just about to go downstairs when Lucy Stewart called him. She was quite at the other end of the corridor, at the door of her stage box. They were getting cooked in there, she said, and she took up the whole corridor in company with Caroline Héquet and her mother, all three nibbling burnt almonds. A box opener was chatting maternally with them. Lucy fell out with the journalist. He was a pretty fellow, to be sure! He went up to see other women and didn't even come and ask if they were thirsty! Then, changing the subject:

"You know, dear boy, I think Nana very nice."

She wanted him to stay in the stage box for the last act, but he made his escape, promising to catch them at the door afterward. Downstairs in front of the theater Fauchery and La Faloise lit cigarettes. A great gathering blocked the sidewalk, a stream of men who had come down from the theater steps and were inhaling the fresh night air in the boulevards, where the roar and battle had diminished.

Meanwhile Mignon had drawn Steiner away to the Café des Variétés. Seeing Nana's success, he had set to work to talk enthusiastically about her, all the while observing the banker out of the corners of his eyes. He knew him well; twice he had helped him to deceive Rose and then, the caprice being over, had brought him back to her, faithful and repentant. In the café the too-numerous crowd of customers were squeezing themselves round the marble-topped tables. Several were standing up, drinking in a great hurry. The tall mirrors reflected this thronging world of heads to infinity and magnified the narrow room beyond measure with its three chandeliers, its moleskin-covered seats and its winding staircase draped with red. Steiner went and seated himself at a table in the first saloon, which opened full on the boulevard, its doors having been removed rather early for the time of year. As Fauchery and La Faloise were passing the banker stopped them.

"Come and take a bock with us, eh?" they said.

But he was too preoccupied by an idea; he wanted to have a bouquet thrown to Nana. At last he called a waiter belonging to the café, whom he familiarly addressed as Auguste. Mignon, who was listening, looked at him so sharply that he lost countenance and stammered out:

"Two bouquets, Auguste, and deliver them to the attendant. A bouquet for each of these ladies! Happy thought, eh?"

At the other end of the saloon, her shoulders resting against the frame of a mirror, a girl, some eighteen years of age at the outside, was leaning motionless in front of her empty glass as though she had been benumbed by long and fruitless waiting. Under the natural curls of her beautiful gray-gold hair a virginal face looked out at you with velvety eyes, which were at once soft and candid.

She wore a dress of faded green silk and a round hat which blows had dented. The cool air of the night made her look very pale.

"Egad, there's Satin," murmured Fauchery when his eye lit upon her.

La Faloise questioned him. Oh dear, yes, she was a streetwalker—she didn't count. But she was such a scandalous sort that people amused themselves by making her talk. And the journalist, raising his voice:

"What are you doing there, Satin?"

"I'm bogging," replied Satin quietly without changing position.

The four men were charmed and fell a-laughing. Mignon assured them that there was no need to hurry; it would take twenty minutes to set up the scenery for the third act. But the two cousins, having drunk their beer, wanted to go up into the theater again; the cold was making itself felt. Then Mignon remained alone with Steiner, put his elbows on the table and spoke to him at close quarters.

"It's an understood thing, eh? We are to go to her house, and I'm to introduce you. You know the thing's quite between ourselves—my wife needn't know."

Once more in their places, Fauchery and La Faloise noticed a pretty, quietly dressed woman in the second tier of boxes. She was with a serious-looking gentleman, a chief clerk at the office of the Ministry of the Interior, whom La Faloise knew, having met him at the Muffats'. As to Fauchery, he was under the impression that her name was Madame Robert, a lady of honorable repute who had a lover, only one, and that always a person of respectability.

But they had to turn round, for Daguenet was smiling at them. Now that Nana had had a success he no longer hid himself: indeed, he had just been scoring triumphs in the passages. By his side was the young truant schoolboy, who had not quitted his seat, so stupefying was the state of admiration into which Nana had plunged him. That was it, he thought; that was the woman! And he blushed as he thought so and dragged his gloves on and off mechanically. Then since his neighbor had spoken of Nana, he ventured to question him.

"Will you pardon me for asking you, sir, but that lady who is acting—do you know her?"

"Yes, I do a little," murmured Daguenet with some surprise and hesitation.

"Then you know her address?"

The question, addressed as it was to him, came so abruptly that he felt inclined to respond with a box on the ear.

"No," he said in a dry tone of voice.

And with that he turned his back. The fair lad knew that he had just been guilty of some breach of good manners. He blushed more hotly than ever and looked scared.

The traditional three knocks were given, and among the returning throng, attendants, laden with pelisses and overcoats, bustled about at a great rate in order to put away people's things. The clappers applauded the scenery, which represented a grotto on Mount Etna, hollowed out in a silver mine and with sides glittering like new money. In the background Vulcan's forge glowed like a setting star. Diana, since the second act, had come to a good understanding with the god, who was to pretend that he was on a journey, so as to leave the way clear for Venus and Mars. Then scarcely was Diana alone than Venus made her appearance. A shiver of delight ran round the house. Nana was nude. With quiet audacity she appeared in her nakedness, certain of the sovereign power of her flesh. Some gauze enveloped her, but her rounded shoulders, her Amazonian bosom, her wide hips, which swayed to and fro voluptuously, her whole body, in fact, could be divined, nay discerned, in all its foamlke whiteness of tint beneath the slight fabric she wore. It was Venus rising from the waves with no veil save her tresses. And when Nana lifted her arms the golden hairs in her armpits were observable in the glare of the footlights. There was no applause. Nobody laughed any more. The men strained forward with serious faces, sharp features, mouths irritated and parched. A wind seemed to have passed, a soft, soft wind, laden with a secret menace. Suddenly in the bouncing child the woman stood discovered, a woman full of restless suggestion, who brought with her the delirium of sex and opened the gates of the unknown world of desire. Nana was smiling still, but her smile was now bitter, as of a devourer of men.

"By God," said Fauchery quite simply to La Faloise.

Mars in the meantime, with his plume of feathers, came hurrying to the trysting place and found himself between the two goddesses. Then ensued a passage which Prullière played with great delicacy. Petted by Diana, who wanted to make a final attack upon his feelings before delivering him up to Vulcan, wheedled by Venus, whom the presence of her rival excited, he gave himself up to these tender delights with the beatified expression of a man in clover. Finally a grand trio brought the scene to a close, and it was then that an attendant appeared in Lucy Stewart's box and threw on the stage two immense bouquets of white lilacs. There was applause; Nana and Rose Mignon bowed, while Prullière picked up the bouquets. Many of the occupants of the stalls turned smilingly toward the ground-floor occupied by Steiner and Mignon. The banker, his face blood-red, was suffering from little convulsive twitchings of the chin, as though he had a stoppage in his throat.

What followed took the house by storm completely. Diana had gone off in a rage, and directly afterward, Venus, sitting on a moss-clad seat, called Mars to her. Never yet had a more glowing scene of seduction been ventured on. Nana, her arms round Prullière's neck, was drawing him toward her when Fontan, with comically furious mimicry and an exaggerated imitation of the face of an outraged husband who surprises his wife in *flagrante delicto*, ap-

peared at the back of the grotto. He was holding the famous net with iron meshes. For an instant he poised and swung it, as a fisherman does when he is going to make a cast, and by an ingenious twist Venus and Mars were caught in the snare; the net wrapped itself round them and held them motionless in the attitude of happy lovers.

A murmur of applause swelled and swelled like a growing sigh. There was some hand clapping, and every opera glass was fixed on Venus. Little by little Nana had taken possession of the public, and now every man was her slave.

A wave of lust had flowed from her as from an excited animal, and its influence had spread and spread and spread till the whole house was possessed by it. At that moment her slightest movement blew the flame of desire: with her little finger she ruled men's flesh. Backs were arched and quivered as though unseen violin bows had been drawn across their muscles; upon men's shoulders appeared fugitive hairs, which flew in air, blown by warm and wandering breaths, breathed one knew not from what feminine mouth. In front of him Fauchery saw the truant schoolboy half lifted from his seat by passion. Curiosity led him to look at the Count de Vandeuves—he was extremely pale, and his lips looked pinched—at fat Steiner, whose face was purple to the verge of apoplexy; at Labordette, ogling away with the highly astonished air of a horse dealer admiring a perfectly shaped mare; at Daguenet, whose ears were blood-red and twitching with enjoyment. Then a sudden idea made him glance behind, and he marveled at what he saw in the Muffats' box. Behind the countess, who was white and serious as usual, the count was sitting straight upright, with mouth agape and face mottled with red, while close by him, in the shadow, the restless eyes of the Marquis de Chouard had become catlike phosphorescent, full of golden sparkles. The house was suffocating; people's very hair grew heavy on their perspiring heads. For three hours back the breath of the multitude had filled and heated the atmosphere with a scent of crowded humanity. Under the swaying glare of the gas the dust clouds in mid-air had grown constantly denser as they hung motionless beneath the chandelier. The whole house seemed to be oscillating, to be lapsing toward dizziness in its fatigue and excitement, full, as it was, of those drowsy midnight desires which flutter in the recesses of the bed of passion. And Nana, in front of this languorous public, these fifteen hundred human beings thronged and smothered in the exhaustion and nervous exasperation which belong to the close of a spectacle, Nana still triumphed by right of her marble flesh and that sexual nature of hers, which was strong enough to destroy the whole crowd of her adorers and yet sustain no injury.

The piece drew to a close. In answer to Vulcan's triumphant summons all the Olympians defiled before the lovers with ohs and ahs of stupefaction and gaiety. Jupiter said, "I think it is light conduct on your part, my son, to summon us to see such a sight as this." Then a reaction took place in favor of Venus. The chorus of cuckolds was again ushered in by Iris and besought the master of the gods not to give effect to its petition, for since women had lived at home, domestic life was becoming impossible for the men: the latter preferred being deceived and happy. That was the moral of the play. Then

Venus was set at liberty, and Vulcan obtained a partial divorce from her. Mars was reconciled with Diana, and Jove, for the sake of domestic peace, packed his little laundress off into a constellation. And finally they extricated Love from his black hole, where instead of conjugating the verb *amo* he had been busy in the manufacture of "dollies." The curtain fell on an apotheosis, wherein the cuckolds' chorus knelt and sang a hymn of gratitude to Venus, who stood there with smiling lips, her stature enhanced by her sovereign nudity.

The audience, already on their feet, were making for the exits. The authors were mentioned, and amid a thunder of applause there were two calls before the curtain. The shout of "Nana! Nana!" rang wildly forth. Then no sooner was the house empty than it grew dark: the footlights went out; the chandelier was turned down; long strips of gray canvas slipped from the stage boxes and swathed the gilt ornamentation of the galleries, and the house, lately so full of heat and noise, lapsed suddenly into a heavy sleep, while a musty, dusty odor began to pervade it. In the front of her box stood the Countess Muffat. Very erect and closely wrapped up in her furs, she stared at the gathering shadows and waited for the crowd to pass away.

In the passages the people were jostling the attendants, who hardly knew what to do among the tumbled heaps of outdoor raiment. Fauchery and La Faloise had hurried in order to see the crowd pass out. All along the entrance hall men formed a living hedge, while down the double staircase came slowly and in regular, complete formation two interminable throngs of human beings. Steiner, in tow of Mignon, had left the house among the foremost. The Count de Vandeuvres took his departure with Blanche de Sivry on his arm. For a moment or two Gaga and her daughter seemed doubtful how to proceed, but Labordette made haste to go and fetch them a conveyance, the door whereof he gallantly shut after them. Nobody saw Daguenet go by. As the truant schoolboy, registering a mental vow to wait at the stage door, was running with burning cheeks toward the Passage des Panoramas, of which he found the gate closed, Satin, standing on the edge of the pavement, moved forward and brushed him with her skirts, but he in his despair gave her a savage refusal and vanished amid the crowd, tears of impotent desire in his eyes. Members of the audience were lighting their cigars and walking off, humming:

When Venus roams at eventide.

Satin had gone back in front of the Café des Variétés, where Auguste let her eat the sugar that remained over from the customers' orders. A stout man, who came out in a very heated condition, finally carried her off in the shadow of the boulevard, which was now gradually going to sleep.

Still people kept coming downstairs. La Faloise was waiting for Clarisse; Fauchery had promised to catch up Lucy Stewart with Caroline Héquet and her mother. They came; they took up a whole corner of the entrance hall and were laughing very loudly when the Muffats passed by them with an icy expression. Bordenave had just then opened a little door and, peeping out, had

obtained from Fauchery the formal promise of an article. He was dripping with perspiration, his face blazed, as though he were drunk with success.

"You're good for two hundred nights," La Faloise said to him with civility. "The whole of Paris will visit your theater."

But Bordenave grew annoyed and, indicating with a jerk of his chin the public who filled the entrance hall—a herd of men with parched lips and ardent eyes, still burning with the enjoyment of Nana—he cried out violently:

"Say 'my brothel,' you obstinate devil!"

CHAPTER II

AT TEN O'CLOCK the next morning Nana was still asleep. She occupied the second floor of a large new house in the Boulevard Haussmann, the landlord of which let flats to single ladies in order by their means to dry the paint. A rich merchant from Moscow, who had come to pass a winter in Paris, had installed her there after paying six months' rent in advance. The rooms were too big for her and had never been completely furnished. The vulgar sumptuousness of gilded consoles and gilded chairs formed a crude contrast therein to the bric-a-brac of a secondhand furniture shop—to mahogany round tables, that is to say, and zinc candelabras, which sought to imitate Florentine bronze. All of which smacked of the courtesan too early deserted by her first serious protector and fallen back on shabby lovers, of a precarious first appearance of a bad start, handicapped by refusals of credit and threats of eviction.

Nana was sleeping on her face, hugging in her bare arms a pillow in which she was burying cheeks grown pale in sleep. The bedroom and the dressing room were the only two apartments which had been properly furnished by a neighboring upholsterer. A ray of light, gliding in under a curtain, rendered visible rosewood furniture and hangings and chairbacks of figured damask with a pattern of big blue flowers on a gray ground. But in the soft atmosphere of that slumbering chamber Nana suddenly awoke with a start, as though surprised to find an empty place at her side. She looked at the other pillow lying next to hers; there was the dint of a human head among its flounces: it was still warm. And groping with one hand, she pressed the knob of an electric bell by her bed's head.

"He's gone then?" she asked the maid who presented herself.

"Yes, madame, Monsieur Paul went away not ten minutes back. As Madame was tired, he did not wish to wake her. But he ordered me to tell Madame that he would come tomorrow."

As she spoke Zoé, the lady's maid, opened the outer shutter. A flood of daylight entered. Zoé, a dark brunette with hair in little plaits, had a long canine face, at once livid and full of seams, a snub nose, thick lips and two black eyes in continual movement.

"Tomorrow, tomorrow," repeated Nana, who was not yet wide awake, "is tomorrow the day?"

"Yes, madame, Monsieur Paul has always come on the Wednesday."

"No, now I remember," said the young woman, sitting up. "It's all changed. I wanted to tell him so this morning. He would run against the nigger! We should have a nice to-do!"

"Madame did not warn me; I couldn't be aware of it," murmured Zoé. "When Madame changes her days she will do well to tell me so that I may know. Then the old miser is no longer due on the Tuesday?"

Between themselves they were wont thus gravely to nickname as "old miser" and "nigger" their two paying visitors, one of whom was a tradesman of economical tendencies from the Faubourg Saint-Denis, while the other was a Walachian, a mock count, whose money, paid always at the most irregular intervals, never looked as though it had been honestly come by. Daguenet had made Nana give him the days subsequent to the old miser's visits, and as the trader had to be at home by eight o'clock in the morning, the young man would watch for his departure from Zoé's kitchen and would take his place, which was still quite warm, till ten o'clock. Then he, too, would go about his business. Nana and he were wont to think it a very comfortable arrangement.

"So much the worse," said Nana; "I'll write to him this afternoon. And if he doesn't receive my letter, then tomorrow you will stop him coming in."

In the meantime Zoé was walking softly about the room. She spoke of yesterday's great hit. Madame had shown such talent; she sang so well! Ah! Madame need not fret at all now!

Nana, her elbow dug into her pillow, only tossed her head in reply. Her nightdress had slipped down on her shoulders, and her hair, unfastened and entangled, flowed over them in masses.

"Without doubt," she murmured, becoming thoughtful; "but what's to be done to gain time? I'm going to have all sorts of bothers today. Now let's see, has the porter come upstairs yet this morning?"

Then both the women talked together seriously. Nana owed three quarters' rent; the landlord was talking of seizing the furniture. Then, too, there was a perfect downpour of creditors; there was a livery-stable man, a needlewoman, a ladies' tailor, a charcoal dealer and others besides, who came every day and settled themselves on a bench in the little hall. The charcoal dealer especially was a dreadful fellow—he shouted on the staircase. But Nana's greatest cause of distress was her little Louis, a child she had given birth to when she was sixteen and now left in charge of a nurse in a village in the neighborhood of Rambouillet. This woman was clamoring for the sum of three hundred francs before she would consent to give the little Louis back to her. Nana, since her last visit to the child, had been seized with a fit of maternal love and was desperate at the thought that she could not realize a project, which had now become a hobby with her. This was to pay off the nurse and to place the little man with his aunt, Mme Lerat, at the Batignolles, whither she could go and see him as often as she liked.

Meanwhile the lady's maid kept hinting that her mistress ought to have confided her necessities to the old miser.

"To be sure, I told him everything," cried Nana, "and he told me in answer that he had too many big liabilities. He won't go beyond his thousand francs a

month. The nigger's beggared just at present; I expect he's lost at play. As to that poor Mimi, he stands in great need of a loan himself; a fall in stocks has cleaned him out—he can't even bring me flowers now."

She was speaking of Daguenet. In the self-abandonment of her awakening she had no secrets from Zoé, and the latter, inured to such confidences, received them with respectful sympathy. Since Madame condescended to speak to her of her affairs she would permit herself to say what she thought. Besides, she was very fond of Madame; she had left Mme Blanche for the express purpose of taking service with her, and heaven knew Mme Blanche was straining every nerve to have her again! Situations weren't lacking; she was pretty well known, but she would have stayed with Madame even in narrow circumstances, because she believed in Madame's future. And she concluded by stating her advice with precision. When one was young one often did silly things. But this time it was one's duty to look alive, for the men only thought of having their fun. Oh dear, yes! Things would right themselves. Madame had only to say one word in order to quiet her creditors and find the money she stood in need of.

"All that doesn't help me to three hundred francs," Nana kept repeating as she plunged her fingers into the vagrant convolutions of her back hair. "I must have three hundred francs today, at once! It's stupid not to know anyone who'll give you three hundred francs."

She racked her brains. She would have sent Mme Lerat, whom she was expecting that very morning, to Rambouillet. The counteraction of her sudden fancy spoiled for her the triumph of last night. Among all those men who had cheered her, to think that there wasn't one to bring her fifteen louis! And then one couldn't accept money in that way! Dear heaven, how unfortunate she was! And she kept harking back again to the subject of her baby—he had blue eyes like a cherub's; he could lisp "Mamma" in such a funny voice that you were ready to die of laughing!

But at this moment the electric bell at the outer door was heard to ring with its quick and tremulous vibration. Zoé returned, murmuring with a confidential air:

"It's a woman."

She had seen this woman a score of times, only she made believe never to recognize her and to be quite ignorant of the nature of her relations with ladies in difficulties.

"She has told me her name—Madame Tricon."

"The Tricon," cried Nana. "Dear me! That's true. I'd forgotten her. Show her in."

Zoé ushered in a tall old lady who wore ringlets and looked like a countess who haunts lawyers' offices. Then she effaced herself, disappearing noiselessly with the lithe, serpentine movement wherewith she was wont to withdraw from a room on the arrival of a gentleman. However, she might have stayed. The Tricon did not even sit down. Only a brief exchange of words took place.

"I have someone for you today. Do you care about it?"

"Yes. How much?"

"Twenty louis."

"At what o'clock?"

"At three. It's settled then?"

"It's settled."

Straightway the Tricon talked of the state of the weather. It was dry weather, pleasant for walking. She had still four or five persons to see. And she took her departure after consulting a small memorandum book. When she was once more alone Nana appeared comforted. A slight shiver agitated her shoulders, and she wrapped herself softly up again in her warm bedclothes with the lazy movements of a cat who is susceptible to cold. Little by little her eyes closed, and she lay smiling at the thought of dressing Louiset prettily on the following day, while in the slumber into which she once more sank last night's long, feverish dream of endlessly rolling applause returned like a sustained accompaniment to music and gently soothed her lassitude.

At eleven o'clock, when Zoé showed Mme Lerat into the room, Nana was still asleep. But she woke at the noise and cried out at once:

"It's you. You'll go to Rambouillet today?"

"That's what I've come for," said the aunt. "There's a train at twenty past twelve. I've got time to catch it."

"No, I shall only have the money by and by," replied the young woman, stretching herself and throwing out her bosom. "You'll have lunch, and then we'll see."

Zoé brought a dressing jacket.

"The hairdresser's here, madame," she murmured.

But Nana did not wish to go into the dressing room. And she herself cried out:

"Come in, Francis."

A well-dressed man pushed open the door and bowed. Just at that moment Nana was getting out of bed, her bare legs in full view. But she did not hurry and stretched her hands out so as to let Zoé draw on the sleeves of the dressing jacket. Francis, on his part, was quite at his ease and without turning away waited with a sober expression on his face.

"Perhaps Madame has not seen the papers. There's a very nice article in the *Figaro*."

He had brought the journal. Mme Lerat put on her spectacles and read the article aloud, standing in front of the window as she did so. She had the build of a policeman, and she drew herself up to her full height, while her nostrils seemed to compress themselves whenever she uttered a gallant epithet. It was a notice by Fauchery, written just after the performance, and it consisted of a couple of very glowing columns, full of witty sarcasm about the artist and of broad admiration for the woman.

"Excellent!" Francis kept repeating.

Nana laughed good-humoredly at his chaffing her about her voice! He was a nice fellow, was that Fauchery, and she would repay him for his charming style of writing. Mme Lerat, after having reread the notice, roundly declared that the men all had the devil in their shanks, and she refused to explain her--

self further, being fully satisfied with a brisk allusion of which she alone knew the meaning. Francis finished turning up and fastening Nana's hair. He bowed and said:

"I'll keep my eye on the evening papers. At half-past five as usual, eh?"

"Bring me a pot of pomade and a pound of burnt almonds from Boissier's," Nana cried to him across the drawing room just as he was shutting the door after him.

Then the two women, once more alone, recollected that they had not embraced, and they planted big kisses on each other's cheeks. The notice warmed their hearts. Nana, who up till now had been half asleep, was again seized with the fever of her triumph. Dear, dear, 'twas Rose Mignon that would be spending a pleasant morning! Her aunt having been unwilling to go to the theater because, as she averred, sudden emotions ruined her stomach, Nana set herself to describe the events of the evening and grew intoxicated at her own recital, as though all Paris had been shaken to the ground by the applause. Then suddenly interrupting herself, she asked with a laugh if one would ever have imagined it all when she used to go traipsing about the Rue de la Goutte-d'Or. Mme Lerat shook her head. No, no, one never could have foreseen it! And she began talking in her turn, assuming a serious air as she did so and calling Nana "daughter." Wasn't she a second mother to her since the first had gone to rejoin Papa and Grandmamma? Nana was greatly softened and on the verge of tears. But Mme Lerat declared that the past was the past—oh yes, to be sure, a dirty past with things in it which it was as well not to stir up every day. She had left off seeing her niece for a long time because among the family she was accused of ruining herself along with the little thing. Good God, as though that were possible! She didn't ask for confidences; she believed that Nana had always lived decently, and now it was enough for her to have found her again in a fine position and to observe her kind feelings toward her son. Virtue and hard work were still the only things worth anything in this world.

"Who is the baby's father?" she said, interrupting herself, her eyes lit up with an expression of acute curiosity.

Nana was taken by surprise and hesitated a moment.

"A gentleman," she replied.

"There now!" rejoined the aunt. "They declared that you had him by a stonemason who was in the habit of beating you. Indeed, you shall tell me all about it someday; you know I'm discreet! Tut, tut, I'll look after him as though he were a prince's son."

She had retired from business as a florist and was living on her savings, which she had got together sou by sou, till now they brought her in an income of six hundred francs a year. Nana promised to rent some pretty little lodgings for her and to give her a hundred francs a month besides. At the mention of this sum the aunt forgot herself and shrieked to her niece, bidding her squeeze their throats, since she had them in her grasp. She was meaning the men, of course. Then they both embraced again, but in the midst of her rejoicing Nana's face, as she led the talk back to the subject of Louiset, seemed to be overshadowed by a sudden recollection.

"Isn't it a bore I've got to go out at three o'clock?" she muttered. "It is a nuisance!"

Just then Zoé came in to say that lunch was on the table. They went into the dining room, where an old lady was already seated at table. She had not taken her hat off, and she wore a dark dress of an indecisive color midway between puce and goose dripping. Nana did not seem surprised at sight of her. She simply asked her why she hadn't come into the bedroom.

"I heard voices," replied the old lady. "I thought you had company."

Mme Maloir, a respectable-looking and mannerly woman, was Nana's old friend, chaperon and companion. Mme Lerat's presence seemed to fidget her at first. Afterward, when she became aware that it was Nana's aunt, she looked at her with a sweet expression and a die-away smile. In the meantime Nana, who averred that she was as hungry as a wolf, threw herself on the radishes and gobbled them up without bread. Mme Lerat had become ceremonious; she refused the radishes as provocative of phlegm. By and by when Zoé had brought in the cutlets Nana just chipped the meat and contented herself with sucking the bones. Now and again she scrutinized her old friend's hat out of the corners of her eyes.

"It's the new hat I gave you?" she ended by saying.

"Yes, I made it up," murmured Mme Maloir, her mouth full of meat.

The hat was smart to distraction. In front it was greatly exaggerated, and it was adorned with a lofty feather. Mme Maloir had a mania for doing up all her hats afresh; she alone knew what really became her, and with a few stitches she could manufacture a toque out of the most elegant headgear. Nana, who had bought her this very hat in order not to be ashamed of her when in her company out of doors, was very near being vexed.

"Push it up, at any rate," she cried.

"No, thank you," replied the old lady with dignity. "It doesn't get in my way; I can eat very comfortably as it is."

After the cutlets came cauliflowers and the remains of a cold chicken. But at the arrival of each successive dish Nana made a little face, hesitated, sniffed and left her plateful untouched. She finished her lunch with the help of preserve.

Dessert took a long time. Zoé did not remove the cloth before serving the coffee. Indeed, the ladies simply pushed back their plates before taking it. They talked continually of yesterday's charming evening. Nana kept rolling cigarettes, which she smoked, swinging up and down on her backward-tilted chair. And as Zoé had remained behind and was lounging idly against the sideboard, it came about that the company were favored with her history. She said she was the daughter of a midwife at Bercy who had failed in business. First of all she had taken service with a dentist and after that with an insurance agent, but neither place suited her, and she thereupon enumerated, not without a certain amount of pride, the names of the ladies with whom she had served as lady's maid. Zoé spoke of these ladies as one who had had the making of their fortunes. It was very certain that without her more than one would have had some queer tales to tell. Thus one day, when Mme Blanche was with M. Octave, in came the old gentleman. What did Zoé do? She made believe to tumble

as she crossed the drawing room; the old boy rushed up to her assistance, flew to the kitchen to fetch her a glass of water, and M. Octave slipped away.

"Oh, she's a good girl, you bet!" said Nana, who was listening to her with tender interest and a sort of submissive admiration.

"Now I've had my troubles," began Mme Lerat. And edging up to Mme Maloir, she imparted to her certain confidential confessions. Both ladies took lumps of sugar dipped in cognac and sucked them. But Mme Maloir was wont to listen to other people's secrets without even confessing anything concerning herself. People said that she lived on a mysterious allowance in a room whither no one ever penetrated.

All of a sudden Nana grew excited.

"Don't play with the knives, Aunt. You know it gives me a turn!"

Without thinking about it Mme Lerat had crossed two knives on the table in front of her. Notwithstanding this, the young woman defended herself from the charge of superstition. Thus, if the salt were upset, it meant nothing, even on a Friday; but when it came to knives, that was too much of a good thing; that had never proved fallacious. There could be no doubt that something unpleasant was going to happen to her. She yawned, and then with an air of profound boredom:

"Two o'clock already. I must go out. What a nuisance!"

The two old ladies looked at one another. The three women shook their heads without speaking. To be sure, life was not always amusing. Nana had tilted her chair back anew and lit a cigarette, while the others sat pursing up their lips discreetly, thinking deeply philosophic thoughts.

"While waiting for you to return we'll play a game of bezique," said Mme Maloir after a short silence. "Does Madame play bezique?"

Certainly Mme Lerat played it, and that to perfection. It was no good troubling Zoé, who had vanished—a corner of the table would do quite well. And they pushed back the tablecloth over the dirty plates. But as Mme Maloir was herself going to take the cards out of a drawer in the sideboard, Nana remarked that before she sat down to her game it would be very nice of her if she would write her a letter. It bored Nana to write letters; besides, she was not sure of her spelling, while her old friend could turn out the most feeling epistles. She ran to fetch some good note paper in her bedroom. An inkstand consisting of a bottle of ink worth about three sous stood untidily on one of the pieces of furniture, with a pen deep in rust beside it. The letter was for Daguenet. Mme Maloir herself wrote in her bold English hand, "My darling little man," and then she told him not to come tomorrow because "that could not be" but hastened to add that "she was with him in thought at every moment of the day, whether she were near or far away."

"And I end with 'a thousand kisses,'" she murmured.

Mme Lerat had shown her approval of each phrase with an emphatic nod. Her eyes were sparkling; she loved to find herself in the midst of love affairs. Nay, she was seized with a desire to add some words of her own and, assuming a tender look and cooing like a dove, she suggested:

"A thousand kisses on thy beautiful eyes."

"That's the thing: 'a thousand kisses on thy beautiful eyes!'" Nana repeated, while the two old ladies assumed a beatified expression.

Zoé was rung for and told to take the letter down to a commissionaire. She had just been talking with the theater messenger, who had brought her mistress the day's playbill and rehearsal arrangements, which he had forgotten in the morning. Nana had this individual ushered in and got him to take the latter to Daguenet on his return. Then she put questions to him. Oh yes! M. Bordenave was very pleased; people had already taken seats for a week to come; Madame had no idea of the number of people who had been asking her address since morning. When the man had taken his departure Nana announced that at most she would only be out half an hour. If there were any visitors Zoé would make them wait. As she spoke the electric bell sounded. It was a creditor in the shape of the man of whom she jobbed her carriages. He had settled himself on the bench in the anteroom, and the fellow was free to twiddle his thumbs till night—there wasn't the least hurry now.

"Come, buck up!" said Nana, still torpid with laziness and yawning and stretching afresh. "I ought to be there now!"

Yet she did not budge but kept watching the play of her aunt, who had just announced four aces. Chin on hand, she grew quite engrossed in it but gave a violent start on hearing three o'clock strike.

"Good God!" she cried roughly.

Then Mme Maloir, who was counting the tricks she had won with her tens and aces, said cheerily to her in her soft voice:

"It would be better, dearie, to give up your expedition at once."

"No, be quick about it," said Mme Lerat, shuffling the cards. "I shall take the half-past four o'clock train if you're back here with the money before four o'clock."

"Oh, there 'll be no time lost," she murmured.

Ten minutes after Zoé helped her on with a dress and a hat. It didn't matter much if she were badly turned out. Just as she was about to go downstairs there was a new ring at the bell. This time it was the charcoal dealer. Very well, he might keep the livery-stable keeper company—it would amuse the fellows. Only, as she dreaded a scene, she crossed the kitchen and made her escape by the back stairs. She often went that way and in return had only to lift up her flounces.

"When one is a good mother anything's excusable," said Mme Maloir sententiously when left alone with Mme Lerat.

"Four kings," replied this lady, whom the play greatly excited.

And they both plunged into an interminable game.

The table had not been cleared. The smell of lunch and the cigarette smoke filled the room with an ambient, steamy vapor. The two ladies had again set to work dipping lumps of sugar in brandy and sucking the same. For twenty minutes at least they played and sucked simultaneously when, the electric bell having rung a third time, Zoé bustled into the room and roughly disturbed them, just as if they had been her own friends.

"Look here, that's another ring. You can't stay where you are. If many folks call I must have the whole flat. Now off you go, off you go!"

Mme Maloir was for finishing the game, but Zoé looked as if she was going to pounce down on the cards, and so she decided to carry them off without in any way altering their positions, while Mme Lerat undertook the removal of the brandy bottle, the glasses and the sugar. Then they both scudded to the kitchen, where they installed themselves at the table in an empty space between the dishcloths, which were spread out to dry, and the bowl still full of dish-water.

"We said it was three hundred and forty. It's your turn."

"I play hearts."

When Zoé returned she found them once again absorbed. After a silence, as Mme Lerat was shuffling, Mme Maloir asked who it was.

"Oh, nobody to speak of," replied the servant carelessly; "a slip of a lad! I wanted to send him away again, but he's such a pretty boy with never a hair on his chin and blue eyes and a girl's face! So I told him to wait after all. He's got an enormous bouquet in his hand, which he never once consented to put down. One would like to catch him one—a brat like that who ought to be at school still!"

Mme Lerat went to fetch a water bottle to mix herself some brandy and water, the lumps of sugar having rendered her thirsty. Zoé muttered something to the effect that she really didn't mind if she drank something too. Her mouth, she averred, was as bitter as gall.

"So you put him—?" continued Mme Maloir.

"Oh yes, I put him in the closet at the end of the room, the little unfurnished one. There's only one of my lady's trunks there and a table. It's there I stow the lubbers."

And she was putting plenty of sugar in her grog when the electric bell made her jump. Oh, drat it all! Wouldn't they let her have a drink in peace? If they were to have a peal of bells things promised well. Nevertheless, she ran off to open the door. Returning presently, she saw Mme Maloir questioning her with a glance.

"It's nothing," she said, "only a bouquet."

All three refreshed themselves, nodding to each other in token of salutation. Then while Zoé was at length busy clearing the table, bringing the plates out one by one and putting them in the sink, two other rings followed close upon one another. But they weren't serious, for while keeping the kitchen informed of what was going on she twice repeated her disdainful expression:

"Nothing, only a bouquet."

Notwithstanding which, the old ladies laughed between two of their tricks when they heard her describe the looks of the creditors in the anteroom after the flowers had arrived. Madame would find her bouquets on her toilet table. What a pity it was they cost such a lot and that you could only get ten sous for them! Oh dear, yes, plenty of money was wasted!

"For my part," said Mme Maloir, "I should be quite content if every day of my life I got what the men in Paris had spent on flowers for the women."

"Now, you know, you're not hard to please," murmured Mme Lerat. "Why, one would have only just enough to buy thread with. Four queens, my dear."

It was ten minutes to four. Zoé was astonished, could not understand why her mistress was out so long. Ordinarily when Madame found herself obliged to go out in the afternoons she got it over in double-quick time. But Mme Maloir declared that one didn't always manage things as one wished. Truly, life was beset with obstacles, averred Mme Lerat. The best course was to wait. If her niece was long in coming it was because her occupations detained her; wasn't it so? Besides, they weren't overworked—it was comfortable in the kitchen. And as hearts were out, Mme Lerat threw down diamonds.

The bell began again, and when Zoé reappeared she was burning with excitement.

"My children, it's fat Steiner!" she said in the doorway, lowering her voice as she spoke. "I've put *him* in the little sitting room."

Thereupon Mme Maloir spoke about the banker to Mme Lerat, who knew no such gentleman. Was he getting ready to give Rose Mignon the go-by? Zoé shook her head; she knew a thing or two. But once more she had to go and open the door.

"Here's bothers!" she murmured when she came back. "It's the nigger! 'Twasn't any good telling him that my lady's gone out, and so he's settled himself in the bedroom. We only expected him this evening."

At a quarter past four Nana was not in yet. What could she be after? It was silly of her! Two other bouquets were brought round, and Zoé, growing bored, looked to see if there were any coffee left. Yes, the ladies would willingly finish off the coffee; it would waken them up. Sitting hunched up on their chairs, they were beginning to fall asleep through dint of constantly taking their cards between their fingers with the accustomed movement. The half-hour sounded. Something must decidedly have happened to Madame. And they began whispering to each other.

Suddenly Mme Maloir forgot herself and in a ringing voice announced: "I've the five hundred! Trumps, Major Quint!"

"Oh, do be quiet!" said Zoé angrily. "What will all those gentlemen think?"

And in the silence which ensued and amid the whispered muttering of the two old women at strife over their game, the sound of rapid footsteps ascended from the back stairs. It was Nana at last. Before she had opened the door her breathlessness became audible. She bounced abruptly in, looking very red in the face. Her skirt, the string of which must have been broken, was trailing over the stairs, and her flounces had just been dipped in a puddle of something unpleasant which had oozed out on the landing of the first floor, where the servant girl was a regular slut.

"Here you are! It's lucky!" said Mme Lerat, pursing up her lips, for she was still vexed at Mme Maloir's "five hundred." "You may flatter yourself at the way you keep folks waiting."

"Madame isn't reasonable; indeed, she isn't!" added Zoé.

Nana was already harassed, and these reproaches exasperated her. Was that the way people received her after the worry she had gone through?

"Will you blooming well leave me alone, eh?" she cried.

"Hush, ma'am, there are people in there," said the maid.

Then in lower tones the young woman stuttered breathlessly:

"D'you suppose I've been having a good time? Why, there was no end to it. I should have liked to see you there! I was boiling with rage! I felt inclined to smack somebody. And never a cab to come home in! Luckily it's only a step from here, but never mind that; I did just run home."

"You have the money?" asked the aunt.

"Dear, dear! That question!" rejoined Nana.

She had sat herself down on a chair close up against the stove, for her legs had failed her after so much running, and without stopping to take breath she drew from behind her stays an envelope in which there were four hundred-franc notes. They were visible through a large rent she had torn with savage fingers in order to be sure of the contents. The three women round about her stared fixedly at the envelope, a big, crumpled, dirty receptacle, as it lay clasped in her small gloved hands.

It was too late now—Mme Lerat would not go to Rambouillet till tomorrow, and Nana entered into long explanations.

"There's company waiting for you," the lady's maid repeated.

But Nana grew excited again. The company might wait: she'd go to them all in good time when she'd finished. And as her aunt began putting her hand out for the money:

"Ah no! Not all of it," she said. "Three hundred francs for the nurse, fifty for your journey and expenses, that's three hundred and fifty. Fifty francs I keep."

The big difficulty was how to find change. There were not ten francs in the house. But they did not even address themselves to Mme Maloir who, never having more than a six-sou omnibus fair upon her, was listening in quite a disinterested manner. At length Zoé went out of the room, remarking that she would go and look in her box, and she brought back a hundred francs in hundred-sou pieces. They were counted out on a corner of the table, and Mme Lerat took her departure at once after having promised to bring Louiset back with her the following day.

"You say there's company there?" continued Nana, still sitting on the chair and resting herself.

"Yes, madame, three people."

And Zoé mentioned the banker first. Nana made a face. Did that man Steiner think she was going to let herself be bored because he had thrown her a bouquet yesterday evening?

"Besides, I've had enough of it," she declared. "I shan't receive today. Go and say you don't expect me now."

"Madame will think the matter over; Madame will receive Monsieur Steiner," murmured Zoé gravely, without budging from her place. She was annoyed to see her mistress on the verge of committing another foolish mistake.

Then she mentioned the Walachian, who ought by now to find time hanging heavy on his hands in the bedroom. Whereupon Nana grew furious and

more obstinate than ever. No, she would see nobody, nobody! Who'd sent her such a blooming leech of a man?

"Chuck 'em all out! I—I'm going to play a game of bezique with Madame Maloir. I prefer doing that."

The bell interrupted her remarks. That was the last straw. Another of the beggars yet! She forbade Zoé to go and open the door, but the latter had left the kitchen without listening to her, and when she reappeared she brought back a couple of cards and said authoritatively:

"I told them that Madame was receiving visitors. The gentlemen are in the drawing room."

Nana had sprung up, raging, but the names of the Marquis de Chouard and of Count Muffat de Beuville, which were inscribed on the cards, calmed her down. For a moment or two she remained silent.

"Who are they?" she asked at last. "You know them?"

"I know the old fellow," replied Zoé, discreetly pursing up her lips.

And her mistress continuing to question her with her eyes, she added simply: "I've seen him somewhere."

This remark seemed to decide the young woman. Regretfully she left the kitchen, that asylum of steaming warmth, where you could talk and take your ease amid the pleasant fumes of the coffeepot which was being kept warm over a handful of glowing embers. She left Mme Maloir behind her. That lady was now busy reading her fortune by the cards; she had never yet taken her hat off, but now in order to be more at her ease she undid the strings and threw them back over her shoulders.

In the dressing room, where Zoé rapidly helped her on with a tea gown, Nana revenged herself for the way in which they were all boring her by muttering quiet curses upon the male sex. These big words caused the lady's maid not a little distress, for she saw with pain that her mistress was not rising superior to her origin as quickly as she could have desired. She even made bold to beg Madame to calm herself.

"You bet," was Nana's crude answer; "they're swine; they glory in that sort of thing."

Nevertheless, she assumed her princesslike manner, as she was wont to call it. But just when she was turning to go into the drawing room Zoé held her back and herself introduced the Marquis de Chouard and the Count Muffat into the dressing room. It was much better so.

"I regret having kept you waiting, gentlemen," said the young woman with studied politeness.

The two men bowed and seated themselves. A blind of embroidered tulle kept the little room in twilight. It was the most elegant chamber in the flat, for it was hung with some light-colored fabric and contained a cheval glass framed in inlaid wood, a lounge chair and some others with arms and blue satin upholstery. On the toilet table the bouquets—roses, lilacs and hyacinths—appeared like a very ruin of flowers. Their perfume was strong and penetrating, while through the dampish air of the place, which was full of the spoiled exhalations of the washstand, came occasional whiffs of a more pungent scent, the scent

of some grains of dry patchouli ground to fine powder at the bottom of a cup. And as she gathered herself together and drew up her dressing jacket, which had been ill fastened, Nana had all the appearance of having been surprised at her toilet: her skin was still damp; she smiled and looked quite startled amid her frills and laces.

"Madame, you will pardon our insistence," said the Count Muffat gravely. "We come on a quest. Monsieur and I are members of the Benevolent Organization of the district."

The Marquis de Chouard hastened gallantly to add:

"When we learned that a great artiste lived in this house we promised ourselves that we would put the claims of our poor people before her in a very special manner. Talent is never without a heart."

Nana pretended to be modest. She answered them with little assenting movements of her head, making rapid reflections at the same time. It must be the old man that had brought the other one: he had such wicked eyes. And yet the other was not to be trusted either: the veins near his temples were so queerly puffed up. He might quite well have come by himself. Ah, now that she thought of it, it was this way: the porter had given them her name, and they had egged one another on, each with his own ends in view.

"Most certainly, gentlemen, you were quite right to come up," she said with a very good grace.

But the electric bell made her tremble again. Another call, and that Zoé always opening the door! She went on:

"One is only too happy to be able to give."

At bottom she was flattered.

"Ah, madame," rejoined the marquis, "if only you knew about it! there's such misery! Our district has more than three thousand poor people in it, and yet it's one of the richest. You cannot picture to yourself anything like the present distress—children with no bread, women ill, utterly without assistance, perishing of the cold!"

"The poor souls!" cried Nana, very much moved.

Such was her feeling of compassion that tears flooded her fine eyes. No longer studying deportment, she leaned forward with a quick movement, and under her open dressing jacket her neck became visible, while the bent position of her knees served to outline the rounded contour of the thigh under the thin fabric of her skirt. A little flush of blood appeared in the marquis's cadaverous cheeks. Count Muffat, who was on the point of speaking, lowered his eyes. The air of that little room was too hot: it had the close, heavy warmth of a greenhouse. The roses were withering, and intoxicating odors floated up from the patchouli in the cup.

"One would like to be very rich on occasions like this," added Nana. "Well, well, we each do what we can. Believe me, gentlemen, if I had known——"

She was on the point of being guilty of a silly speech, so melted was she at heart. But she did not end her sentence and for a moment was worried at not being able to remember where she had put her fifty francs on changing her dress. But she recollected at last: they must be on the corner of her toilet table

under an inverted pomatum pot. As she was in the act of rising the bell sounded for quite a long time. Capital! Another of them still! It would never end. The count and the marquis had both risen, too, and the ears of the latter seemed to be pricked up and, as it were, pointing toward the door; doubtless he knew that kind of ring. Muffat looked at him; then they averted their gaze mutually. They felt awkward and once more assumed their frigid bearing, the one looking square-set and solid with his thick head of hair, the other drawing back his lean shoulders, over which fell his fringe of thin white locks.

"My faith," said Nana, bringing the ten big silver pieces and quite determined to laugh about it, "I am going to entrust you with this, gentlemen. It is for the poor."

And the adorable little dimple in her chin became apparent. She assumed her favorite pose, her amiable baby expression, as she held the pile of five-franc pieces on her open palm and offered it to the men, as though she were saying to them, "Now then, who wants some?" The count was the sharper of the two. He took fifty francs but left one piece behind and, in order to gain possession of it, had to pick it off the young woman's very skin, a moist, supple skin, the touch of which sent a thrill through him. She was thoroughly merry and did not cease laughing.

"Come, gentlemen," she continued. "Another time I hope to give more."

The gentlemen no longer had any pretext for staying, and they bowed and went toward the door. But just as they were about to go out the bell rang anew. The marquis could not conceal a faint smile, while a frown made the count look more grave than before. Nana detained them some seconds so as to give Zoé time to find yet another corner for the newcomers. She did not relish meetings at her house. Only this time the whole place must be packed! She was therefore much relieved when she saw the drawing room empty and asked herself whether Zoé had really stuffed them into the cupboards.

"*Au revoir*, gentlemen," she said, pausing on the threshold of the drawing room.

It was as though she lapped them in her laughing smile and clear, unclouded glance. The Count Muffat bowed slightly. Despite his great social experience he felt that he had lost his equilibrium. He needed air; he was overcome with the dizzy feeling engendered in that dressing room with a scent of flowers, with a feminine essence which choked him. And behind his back, the Marquis de Chouard, who was sure that he could not be seen, made so bold as to wink at Nana, his whole face suddenly altering its expression as he did so, and his tongue nigh lolling from his mouth.

When the young woman re-entered the little room, where Zoé was awaiting her with letters and visiting cards, she cried out, laughing more heartily than ever:

"There are a pair of beggars for you! Why, they've got away with my fifty francs!"

She wasn't vexed. It struck her as a joke that *men* should have got money out of her. All the same, they were swine, for she hadn't a sou left. But at sight of the cards and the letters her bad temper returned. As to the letters,

why, she said "pass" to them. They were from fellows who, after **af** her last night, were now making their declarations. And as to the callers, they might go about their business!

Zoé had stowed them all over the place, and she called attention to the great capabilities of the flat, every room in which opened on the corridor. That wasn't the case at Mme Blanche's, where people had all to go through the drawing room. Oh yes, Mme Blanche had had plenty of bothers over it!

"You will send them all away," continued Nana in pursuance of her idea. "Begin with the nigger."

"Oh, as to him, madame, I gave him his marching orders a while ago," said Zoé with a grin. "He only wanted to tell Madame that he couldn't come to-night."

There was vast joy at this announcement, and Nana clapped her hands. He wasn't coming, what good luck! She would be free then! And she emitted sighs of relief, as though she had been let off the most abominable of tortures. Her first thought was for Daguenet. Poor duck, why, she had just written to tell him to wait till Thursday! Quick, quick, Mme Maloir should write a second letter! But Zoé announced that Mme Maloir had slipped away unnoticed, according to her wont. Whereupon Nana, after talking of sending someone to him, began to hesitate. She was very tired. A long night's sleep—oh, it would be so jolly! The thought of such a treat overcame her at last. For once in a way she could allow herself that!

"I shall go to bed when I come back from the theater," she murmured greedily, "and you won't wake me before noon."

Then raising her voice:

"Now then, gee up! Shove the others downstairs!"

Zoé did not move. She would never have dreamed of giving her mistress overt advice, only now she made shift to give Madame the benefit of her experience when Madame seemed to be running her hot head against a wall.

"Monsieur Steiner as well?" she queried curtly.

"Why, certainly!" replied Nana. "Before all the rest."

The maid still waited, in order to give her mistress time for reflection. Would **not** Madame be proud to get such a rich gentleman away from her rival Rose Mignon—a man, moreover, who was known in all the theaters?

"Now make haste, my dear," rejoined Nana, who perfectly understood the situation, "and tell him he pesters me."

But suddenly there was a reversion of feeling. Tomorrow she might want him. Whereupon she laughed, winked once or twice and with a naughty little gesture cried out:

"After all's said and done, if I want him the best way even now is to kick him out of doors."

Zoé seemed much impressed. Struck with a sudden admiration, she gazed at her mistress and then went and chucked Steiner out of doors without further deliberation.

Meanwhile Nana waited patiently for a second or two in order to give her time to sweep the place out, as she phrased it. No one would ever have ex-

pected such a siege! She craned her head into the drawing room and found it empty. The dining room was empty too. But as she continued her visitation in a calmer frame of mind, feeling certain that nobody remained behind, she opened the door of a closet and came suddenly upon a very young man. He was sitting on the top of a trunk, holding a huge bouquet on his knees and looking exceedingly quiet and extremely well behaved.

"Goodness gracious me!" she cried. "There's one of 'em in there even now!"

The very young man had jumped down at sight of her and was blushing as red as a poppy. He did not know what to do with his bouquet, which he kept shifting from one hand to the other, while his looks betrayed the extreme of emotion. His youth, his embarrassment and the funny figure he cut in his struggles with his flowers melted Nana's heart, and she burst into a pretty peal of laughter. Well, now, the very children were coming, were they? Men were arriving in long clothes. So she gave up all airs and graces, became familiar and maternal, tapped her leg and asked for fun:

"You want me to wipe your nose; do you, baby?"

"Yes," replied the lad in a low, supplicating tone.

This answer made her merrier than ever. He was seventeen years old, he said. His name was Georges Hugon. He was at the Variétés last night and now he had come to see her.

"These flowers are for me?"

"Yes."

"Then give 'em to me, booby!"

But as she took the bouquet from him he sprang upon her hands and kissed them with all the gluttonous eagerness peculiar to his charming time of life. She had to beat him to make him let go. There was a dreadful little dribbling customer for you! But as she scolded him she flushed rosy-red and began smiling. And with that she sent him about his business, telling him that he might call again. He staggered away; he could not find the doors.

Nana went back into her dressing room, where Francis made his appearance almost simultaneously in order to dress her hair for the evening. Seated in front of her mirror and bending her head beneath the hairdresser's nimble hands, she stayed silently meditative. Presently, however, Zoé entered, remarking:

"There's one of them, madame, who refuses to go."

"Very well, he must be left alone," she answered quietly.

"If that comes to that they still keep arriving."

"Bah! Tell 'em to wait. When they begin to feel too hungry they'll be off."

Her humor had changed, and she was now delighted to make people wait about for nothing. A happy thought struck her as very amusing; she escaped from beneath Francis' hands and ran and bolted the doors. They might now crowd in there as much as they liked; they would probably refrain from making a hole through the wall. Zoé could come in and out through the little doorway leading to the kitchen. However, the electric bell rang more lustily than ever. Every five minutes a clear, lively little ting-ting recurred as regularly as if it had been produced by some well-adjusted piece of mechanism.

And Nana counted these rings to while the time away withal. But suddenly she remembered something.

"I say, where are my burnt almonds?"

Francis, too, was forgetting about the burnt almonds. But now he drew a paper bag from one of the pockets of his frock coat and presented it to her with the discreet gesture of a man who is offering a lady a present. Nevertheless, whenever his accounts came to be settled, he always put the burnt almonds down on his bill. Nana put the bag between her knees and set to work munching her sweetmeats, turning her head from time to time under the hairdresser's gently compelling touch.

"The deuce," she murmured after a silence, "there's a troop for you!"

Thrice, in quick succession, the bell had sounded. Its summonses became fast and furious. There were modest tintinnabulations which seemed to stutter and tremble like a first avowal; there were bold rings which vibrated under some rough touch and hasty rings which sounded through the house with shivering rapidity. It was a regular peal, as Zoé said, a peal loud enough to upset the neighborhood, seeing that a whole mob of men were jabbing at the ivory button, one after the other. That old joker Bordenave had really been far too lavish with her address. Why, the whole of yesterday's house was coming!

"By the by, Francis, have you five louis?" said Nana.

He drew back, looked carefully at her headdress and then quietly remarked: "Five louis, that's according!"

"Ah, you know if you want securities . . ." she continued.

And without finishing her sentence, she indicated the adjoining rooms with a sweeping gesture. Francis lent the five louis. Zoé, during each momentary respite, kept coming in to get Madame's things ready. Soon she came to dress her while the hairdresser lingered with the intention of giving some finishing touches to the headdress. But the bell kept continually disturbing the lady's maid, who left Madame with her stays half laced and only one shoe on. Despite her long experience, the maid was losing her head. After bringing every nook and corner into requisition and putting men pretty well everywhere, she had been driven to stow them away in threes and fours, which was a course of procedure entirely opposed to her principles. So much the worse for them if they ate each other up! It would afford more room! And Nana, sheltering behind her carefully bolted door, began laughing at them, declaring that she could hear them pant. They ought to be looking lovely in there with their tongues hanging out like a lot of bowwows sitting round on their behinds. Yesterday's success was not yet over, and this pack of men had followed up her scent.

"Provided they don't break anything," she murmured.

She began to feel some anxiety, for she fancied she felt their hot breath coming through chinks in the door. But Zoé ushered Labordette in, and the young woman gave a little shout of relief. He was anxious to tell her about an account he had settled for her at the justice of peace's court. But she did not attend and said:

"I'll take you along with me. We'll have dinner together, and afterward you shall escort me to the Variétés. I don't go on before half-past nine."

Good old Labordette, how lucky it was he had come! He was a fellow who never asked for any favors. He was only the friend of the women, whose little bits of business he arranged for them. Thus on his way in he had dismissed the creditors in the anteroom. Indeed, those good folks really didn't want to be paid. On the contrary, if they *had* been pressing for payment it was only for the sake of complimenting Madame and of personally renewing their offers of service after her grand success of yesterday.

"Let's be off, let's be off," said Nana, who was dressed by now.

But at that moment Zoé came in again, shouting:

"I refuse to open the door any more. They're waiting in a crowd all down the stairs."

A crowd all down the stairs! Francis himself, despite the English stolidity of manner which he was wont to affect, began laughing as he put up his combs. Nana, who had already taken Labordette's arm, pushed him into the kitchen and effected her escape. At last she was delivered from the men and felt happily conscious that she might now enjoy his society anywhere without fear of stupid interruptions.

"You shall see me back to my door," she said as they went down the kitchen stairs. "I shall feel safe, in that case. Just fancy, I want to sleep a whole night quite by myself—yes, a whole night! It's sort of infatuation, dear boy!"

CHAPTER III

THE COUNTESS SABINE, as it had become customary to call Mme Muffat de Beuville in order to distinguish her from the count's mother, who had died the year before, was wont to receive every Tuesday in her house in the Rue Miromesnil at the corner of the Rue de Pentièvre. It was a great square building, and the Muffats had lived in it for a hundred years or more. On the side of the street its frontage seemed to slumber, so lofty was it and dark, so sad and conventlike, with its great outer shutters, which were nearly always closed. And at the back in a little dark garden some trees had grown up and were straining toward the sunlight with such long slender branches that their tips were visible above the roof.

This particular Tuesday, toward ten o'clock in the evening, there were scarcely a dozen people in the drawing room. When she was only expecting intimate friends the countess opened neither the little drawing room nor the dining room. One felt more at home on such occasions and chatted round the fire. The drawing room was very large and very lofty; its four windows looked out upon the garden, from which, on this rainy evening of the close of April, issued a sensation of damp despite the great logs burning on the hearth. The sun never shone down into the room; in the daytime it was dimly lit up by a faint greenish light, but at night, when the lamps and the chandelier were burning, it looked merely a serious old chamber with its massive mahogany First Empire furniture, its hangings and chair coverings of yellow velvet, stamped

with a large design. Entering it, one was in an atmosphere of cold dignity, of ancient manners, of a vanished age, the air of which seemed devotional.

Opposite the armchair, however, in which the count's mother had died—a square armchair of formal design and inhospitable padding, which stood by the hearthside—the Countess Sabine was seated in a deep and cozy lounge, the red silk upholsteries of which were soft as eider down. It was the only piece of modern furniture there, a fanciful item introduced amid the prevailing severity and clashing with it.

"So we shall have the shah of Persia," the young woman was saying.

They were talking of the crowned heads who were coming to Paris for the exhibition. Several ladies had formed a circle round the hearth, and Mme du Joncquoy, whose brother, a diplomat, had just fulfilled a mission in the East, was giving some details about the court of Nazr-ed-Din.

"Are you out of sorts, my dear?" asked Mme Chantereau, the wife of an ironmaster, seeing the countess shivering slightly and growing pale as she did so.

"Oh no, not at all," replied the latter, smiling. "I felt a little cold. This drawing room takes so long to warm."

And with that she raised her melancholy eyes and scanned the walls from floor to ceiling. Her daughter Estelle, a slight, insignificant-looking girl of sixteen, the thankless period of life, quitted the large footstool on which she was sitting and silently came and propped up one of the logs which had rolled from its place. But Mme de Chezelles, a convent friend of Sabine's and her junior by five years, exclaimed:

"Dear me, I would gladly be possessed of a drawing room such as yours! At any rate, you are able to receive visitors. They only build boxes nowadays. Oh, if I were in your place!"

She ran giddily on and with lively gestures explained how she would alter the hangings, the seats—everything, in fact. Then she would give balls to which all Paris should run. Behind her sat her husband, a magistrate, stood listening with serious air. It was rumored that she deceived him quite openly, but people pardoned her offense and received her just the same, because, they said, "she's not answerable for her actions."

"Oh that Léonide!" the Countess Sabine contented herself by murmuring, smiling her faint smile the while.

With a languid movement she eked out the thought that was in her. After having lived there seventeen years she certainly would not alter her drawing room now. It would henceforth remain just such as her mother-in-law had wished to preserve it during her lifetime. Then returning to the subject of conversation:

"I have been assured," she said, "that we shall also have the king of Prussia and the emperor of Russia."

"Yes, some very fine fetes are promised," said Mme du Joncquoy.

The banker Steiner, not long since introduced into this circle by Léonide de Chezelles, who was acquainted with the whole of Parisian society, was sitting chatting on a sofa between two of the windows. He was questioning a deputy,

from whom he was endeavoring with much adroitness to elicit news about a movement on the stock exchange of which he had his suspicions, while the Count Muffat, standing in front of them, was silently listening to their talk, looking, as he did so, even grayer than was his wont.

Four or five young men formed another group near the door round the Count Xavier de Vandevres, who in a low tone was telling them an anecdote. It was doubtless a very risky one, for they were choking with laughter. Companionless in the center of the room, a stout man, a chief clerk at the Ministry of the Interior, sat heavily in an armchair, dozing with his eyes open. But when one of the young men appeared to doubt the truth of the anecdote Vandevres raised his voice.

"You are too much of a skeptic, Foucarmont; you'll spoil all your pleasures that way."

And he returned to the ladies with a laugh. Last scion of a great family, of feminine manners and witty tongue, he was at that time running through a fortune with a rage of life and appetite which nothing could appease. His racing stable, which was one of the best known in Paris, cost him a fabulous amount of money; his betting losses at the Imperial Club amounted monthly to an alarming number of pounds, while taking one year with another, his mistresses would be always devouring now a farm, now some acres of arable land or forest, which amounted, in fact, to quite a respectable slice of his vast estates in Picardy.

"I advise you to call other people skeptics! Why, you don't believe a thing yourself," said Léonide, making shift to find him a little space in which to sit down at her side.

"It's you who spoil your own pleasures."

"Exactly," he replied. "I wish to make others benefit by my experience."

But the company imposed silence on him: he was scandalizing M. Venot. And, the ladies having changed their positions, a little old man of sixty, with bad teeth and a subtle smile, became visible in the depths of an easy chair. There he sat as comfortably as in his own house, listening to everybody's remarks and making none himself. With a slight gesture he announced himself by no means scandalized. Vandevres once more assumed his dignified bearing and added gravely:

"Monsieur Venot is fully aware that I believe what it is one's duty to believe."

It was an act of faith, and even Léonide appeared satisfied. The young men at the end of the room no longer laughed; the company were old fogies, and amusement was not to be found there. A cold breath of wind had passed over them, and amid the ensuing silence Steiner's nasal voice became audible. The deputy's discreet answers were at last driving him to desperation. For a second or two the Countess Sabine looked at the fire; then she resumed the conversation.

"I saw the king of Prussia at Baden-Baden last year. He's still full of vigor for his age."

"Count Bismarck is to accompany him," said Mme du Joncquoy. "Do you

know the count? I lunched with him at my brother's ages ago, when he was representative of Prussia in Paris. There's a man now whose latest successes I cannot in the least understand."

"But why?" asked Mme Chantereau.

"Good gracious, how am I to explain? He doesn't please me. His appearance is boorish and underbred. Besides, so far as I am concerned, I find him stupid."

With that the whole room spoke of Count Bismarck, and opinions differed considerably. Vandevres knew him and assured the company that he was great in his cups and at play. But when the discussion was at its height the door was opened, and Hector de la Falois made his appearance. Fauchery, who followed in his wake, approached the countess and, bowing:

"Madame," he said, "I have not forgotten your extremely kind invitation."

She smiled and made a pretty little speech. The journalist, after bowing to the count, stood for some moments in the middle of the drawing room. He only recognized Steiner and accordingly looked rather out of his element. But Vandevres turned and came and shook hands with him. And forthwith, in his delight at the meeting and with a sudden desire to be confidential, Fauchery buttonholed him and said in a low voice:

"It's tomorrow. Are you going?"

"Egad, yes."

"At midnight, at her house."

"I know, I know. I'm going with Blanche."

He wanted to escape and return to the ladies in order to urge yet another reason in M. de Bismarck's favor. But Fauchery detained him.

"You never will guess whom she has charged me to invite."

And with a slight nod he indicated Count Muffat, who was just then discussing a knotty point in the budget with Steiner and the deputy.

"It's impossible," said Vandevres, stupefaction and merriment in his tones.

"My word on it! I had to swear that I would bring him to her. Indeed, that's one of my reasons for coming here."

Both laughed silently, and Vandevres, hurriedly rejoining the circle of ladies, cried out:

"I declare that on the contrary Monsieur de Bismarck is exceedingly witty. For instance, one evening he said a charmingly epigrammatic thing in my presence."

La Faloise meanwhile had heard the few rapid sentences thus whisperingly interchanged, and he gazed at Fauchery in hopes of an explanation which was not vouchsafed him. Of whom were they talking, and what were they going to do at midnight tomorrow? He did not leave his cousin's side again. The latter had gone and seated himself. He was especially interested by the Countess Sabine. Her name had often been mentioned in his presence, and he knew that, having been married at the age of seventeen, she must now be thirty-four and that since her marriage she had passed a cloistered existence with her husband and her mother-in-law. In society some spoke of her as a woman of religious chastity, while others pitied her and recalled to memory her charming bursts of laughter and the burning glances of her great eyes in the days

prior to her imprisonment in this old town house. Fauchery scrutinized her and yet hesitated. One of his friends, a captain who had recently died in Mexico, had, on the very eve of his departure, made him one of those gross postprandial confessions, of which even the most prudent among men are occasionally guilty. But of this he only retained a vague recollection; they had dined not wisely but too well that evening, and when he saw the countess, in her black dress and with her quiet smile, seated in that Old World drawing room, he certainly had his doubts. A lamp which had been placed behind her threw into clear relief her dark, delicate, plump side face, wherein a certain heaviness in the contours of the mouth alone indicated a species of imperious sensuality.

"What do they want with their Bismarck?" muttered La Faloise, whose constant pretense it was to be bored in good society. "One's ready to kick the bucket here. A pretty idea of yours it was to want to come!"

Fauchery questioned him abruptly.

"Now tell me, does the countess admit someone to her embraces?"

"Oh dear, no, no! My dear fellow!" he stammered, manifestly taken aback and quite forgetting his pose. "Where d'you think we are?"

After which he was conscious of a want of up-to-dateness in this outburst of indignation and, throwing himself back on a great sofa, he added:

"Gad! I say no! But I don't know much about it. There's a little chap out there, Foucarmont they call him, who's to be met with everywhere and at every turn. One's seen faster men than that, though, you bet. However, it doesn't concern me, and indeed, all I know is that if the countess indulges in high jinks she's still pretty sly about it, for the thing never gets about—nobody talks."

Then although Fauchery did not take the trouble to question him, he told him all he knew about the Muffats. Amid the conversation of the ladies, which still continued in front of the hearth, they both spoke in subdued tones, and, seeing them there with their white cravats and gloves, one might have supposed them to be discussing in chosen phraseology some really serious topic. Old Mme Muffat then, whom La Faloise had been well acquainted with, was an insufferable old lady, always hand in glove with the priests. She had the grand manner, besides, and an authoritative way of comporting herself, which bent everybody to her will. As to Muffat, he was an old man's child; his father, a general, had been created count by Napoleon I, and naturally he had found himself in favor after the second of December. He hadn't much gaiety of manner either, but he passed for a very honest man of straightforward intentions and understanding. Add to these a code of old aristocratic ideas and such a lofty conception of his duties at court, of his dignities and of his virtues, that he behaved like a god on wheels. It was the Mamma Muffat who had given him this precious education with its daily visits to the confessional, its complete absence of escapades and of all that is meant by youth. He was a practicing Christian and had attacks of faith of such fiery violence that they might be likened to accessions of burning fever. Finally, in order to add a last touch to the picture, La Faloise whispered something in his cousin's ear.

"You don't say so!" said the latter.

"On my word of honor, they swore it was true! He was still like that when he married."

Fauchery chuckled as he looked at the count, whose face, with its fringe of whiskers and absence of mustaches, seemed to have grown squarer and harder now that he was busy quoting figures to the writhing, struggling Steiner.

"My word, he's got a phiz for it!" murmured Fauchery. "A pretty present he made his wife! Poor little thing, how he must have bored her! She knows nothing about anything, I'll wager!"

Just then the Countess Sabine was saying something to him. But he did not hear her, so amusing and extraordinary did he esteem the Muffats' case. She repeated the question.

"Monsieur Fauchery, have you not published a sketch of Monsieur de Bismarck? You spoke with him once?"

He got up briskly and approached the circle of ladies, endeavoring to collect himself and soon with perfect ease of manner finding an answer:

"Dear me, madame, I assure you I wrote that 'portrait' with the help of biographies which had been published in Germany. I have never seen Monsieur de Bismarck."

He remained beside the countess and, while talking with her, continued his meditations. She did not look her age; one would have set her down as being twenty-eight at most, for her eyes, above all, which were filled with the dark blue shadow of her long eyelashes, retained the glowing light of youth. Bred in a divided family, so that she used to spend one month with the Marquis de Chouart, another with the marquise, she had been married very young, urged on, doubtless, by her father, whom she embarrassed after her mother's death. A terrible man was the marquis, a man about whom strange tales were beginning to be told, and that despite his lofty piety! Fauchery asked if he should have the honor of meeting him. Certainly her father was coming, but only very late; he had so much work on hand! The journalist thought he knew where the old gentleman passed his evenings and looked grave. But a mole, which he noticed close to her mouth on the countess's left cheek, surprised him. Nana had precisely the same mole. It was curious. Tiny hairs curled up on it, only they were golden in Nana's case, black as jet in this. Ah well, never mind! This woman enjoyed nobody's embraces.

"I have always felt a wish to know Queen Augusta," she said. "They say she is so good, so devout. Do you think she will accompany the king?"

"It is not thought that she will, madame," he replied.

She had no lovers: the thing was only too apparent. One had only to look at her there by the side of that daughter of hers, sitting so insignificant and constrained on her footstool. That sepulchral drawing room of hers, which exhaled odors suggestive of being in a church, spoke as plainly as words could of the iron hand, the austere mode of existence, that weighed her down. There was nothing suggestive of her own personality in that ancient abode, black with the damps of years. It was Muffat who made himself felt there, who dominated his surroundings with his devotional training, his penances and his fasts. But the sight of the little old gentleman with the black teeth and subtle smile whom

he suddenly discovered in his armchair behind the group of ladies afforded him a yet more decisive argument. He knew the personage. It was Théophile Venot, a retired lawyer who had made a specialty of church cases. He had left off practice with a handsome fortune and was now leading a sufficiently mysterious existence, for he was received everywhere, treated with great deference and even somewhat feared, as though he had been the representative of a mighty force, an occult power, which was felt to be at his back. Nevertheless, his behavior was very humble. He was churchwarden at the Madeleine Church and had simply accepted the post of deputy mayor at the town house of the Ninth Arrondissement in order, as he said, to have something to do in his leisure time. Deuce take it, the countess was well guarded; there was nothing to be done in that quarter.

"You're right, it's enough to make one kick the bucket here," said Fauchery to his cousin when he had made good his escape from the circle of ladies. "We'll hook it!"

But Steiner, deserted at last by the Count Muffat and the deputy, came up in a fury. Drops of perspiration stood on his forehead, and he grumbled huskily:

"Gad! Let 'em tell me nothing, if nothing they want to tell me. I shall find people who will talk."

Then he pushed the journalist into a corner and, altering his tone, said in accents of victory:

"It's tomorrow, eh? I'm of the party, my bully!"

"Indeed!" muttered Fauchery with some astonishment.

"You didn't know about it. Oh, I had lots of bother to find her at home. Besides, Mignon never would leave me alone."

"But they're to be there, are the Mignons."

"Yes, she told me so. In fact, she did receive my visit, and she invited me. Midnight punctually, after the play."

The banker was beaming. He winked and added with a peculiar emphasis on the words:

"You've worked it, eh?"

"Eh, what?" said Fauchery, pretending not to understand him. "She wanted to thank me for my article, so she came and called on me."

"Yes, yes. You fellows are fortunate. You get rewarded. By the by, who pays the piper tomorrow?"

The journalist made a slight outward movement with his arms, as though he would intimate that no one had ever been able to find out. But Vandeuves called to Steiner, who knew M. de Bismarck. Mme du Joncquoy had almost convinced herself of the truth of her suppositions; she concluded with these words:

"He gave me an unpleasant impression. I think his face is evil. But I am quite willing to believe that he has a deal of wit. It would account for his successes."

"Without doubt," said the banker with a faint smile. He was a Jew from Frankfort.

Meanwhile La Faloise at last made bold to question his cousin. He followed him up and got inside his guard:

"There's supper at a woman's tomorrow evening? With which of them, eh? With which of them?"

Fauchery motioned to him that they were overheard and must respect the conventions here. The door had just been opened anew, and an old lady had come in, followed by a young man in whom the journalist recognized the truant schoolboy, perpetrator of the famous and as yet unforgotten "*très chic*" of the *Blonde Venus* first night. This lady's arrival caused a stir among the company. The Countess Sabine had risen briskly from her seat in order to go and greet her, and she had taken both her hands in hers and addressed her as her "dear Madame Hugon." Seeing that his cousin viewed this little episode with some curiosity, La Faloise sought to arouse his interest and in a few brief phrases explained the position. Mme Hugon, widow of a notary, lived in retirement at Les Fondettes, an old estate of her family's in the neighborhood of Orleans, but she also kept up a small establishment in Paris in a house belonging to her in the Rue de Richelieu and was now passing some weeks there in order to settle her youngest son, who was reading the law and in his "first year." In old times she had been a dear friend of the Marquise de Chouard and had assisted at the birth of the countess, who, prior to her marriage, used to stay at her house for months at a time and even now was quite familiarly treated by her.

"I have brought Georges to see you," said Mme Hugon to Sabine. "He's grown, I trust."

The young man with his clear eyes and the fair curls which suggested a girl dressed up as a boy bowed easily to the countess and reminded her of a bout of battledore and shuttlecock they had had together two years ago at Les Fondettes.

"Philippe is not in Paris?" asked Count Muffat.

"Dear me, no!" replied the old lady. "He is always in garrison at Bourges."

She had seated herself and began talking with considerable pride of her eldest son, a great big fellow who, after enlisting in a fit of waywardness, had of late very rapidly attained the rank of lieutenant. All the ladies behaved to her with respectful sympathy, and conversation was resumed in a tone at once more amiable and more refined. Fauchery, at sight of that respectable Mme Hugon, that motherly face lit up with such a kindly smile beneath its broad tresses of white hair, thought how foolish he had been to suspect the Countess Sabine even for an instant.

Nevertheless, the big chair with the red silk upholsteries in which the countess sat had attracted his attention. Its style struck him as crude, not to say fantastically suggestive, in that dim old drawing room. Certainly it was not the count who had inveigled thither that nest of voluptuous idleness. One might have described it as an experiment, marking the birth of an appetite and of an enjoyment. Then he forgot where he was, fell into brown study and in thought even harked back to that vague confidential announcement imparted to him one evening in the dining room of a restaurant. Impelled by a sort of sensuous curiosity, he had always wanted an introduction into the Muffats' circle, and

now that his friend was in Mexico through all eternity, who could tell what might happen? "We shall see," he thought. It was a folly, doubtless, but the idea kept tormenting him; he felt himself drawn on and his animal nature aroused. The big chair had a rumpled look—its nether cushions had been tumbled, a fact which now amused him.

"Well, shall we be off?" asked La Faloise, mentally vowing that once outside he would find out the name of the woman with whom people were going to sup.

"All in good time," replied Fauchery.

But he was no longer in any hurry and excused himself on the score of the invitation he had been commissioned to give and had as yet not found a convenient opportunity to mention. The ladies were chatting about an assumption of the veil, a very touching ceremony by which the whole of Parisian society had for the last three days been greatly moved. It was the eldest daughter of the Baronne de Fougerey, who, under stress of an irresistible vocation, had just entered the Carmelite Convent. Mme Chantereau, a distant cousin of the Fougereys, told how the baroness had been obliged to take to her bed the day after the ceremony, so overdone was she with weeping.

"I had a very good place," declared Léonide. "I found it interesting."

Nevertheless, Mme Hugon pitied the poor mother. How sad to lose a daughter in such a way!

"I am accused of being overreligious," she said in her quiet, frank manner, "but that does not prevent me thinking the children very cruel who obstinately commit such suicide."

"Yes, it's a terrible thing," murmured the countess, shivering a little, as became a chilly person, and huddling herself anew in the depths of her big chair in front of the fire.

Then the ladies fell into a discussion. But their voices were discreetly attuned, while light trills of laughter now and again interrupted the gravity of their talk. The two lamps on the chimney piece, which had shades of rose-colored lace, cast a feeble light over them while on scattered pieces of furniture there burned but three other lamps, so that the great drawing room remained in soft shadow.

Steiner was getting bored. He was describing to Fauchery an escapade of that little Mme de Chezelles, whom he simply referred to as Léonide. "A black-guard woman," he said, lowering his voice behind the ladies' armchairs. Fauchery looked at her as she sat quaintly perched, in her voluminous ball dress of pale blue satin, on the corner of her armchair. She looked as slight and impudent as a boy, and he ended by feeling astonished at seeing her there. People comported themselves better at Caroline Héquet's, whose mother had arranged her house on serious principles. Here was a perfect subject for an article. What a strange world was this world of Paris! The most rigid circles found themselves invaded. Evidently that silent Théophile Venot, who contented himself by smiling and showing his ugly teeth, must have been a legacy from the late countess. So, too, must have been such ladies of mature age as Mme Chantereau and Mme du Joncquoy, besides four or five old gentlemen who sat motionless in corners. The Count Muffat attracted to the house a series of func-

tionaries, distinguished by the immaculate personal appearance which was at that time required of the men at the Tuileries. Among others there was the chief clerk, who still sat solitary in the middle of the room with his closely shorn checks, his vacant glance and his coat so tight of fit that he could scarce venture to move. Almost all the young men and certain individuals with distinguished, aristocratic manners were the Marquis de Chouard's contribution to the circle, he having kept touch with the Legitimist party after making his peace with the empire on his entrance into the Council of State. There remained Léonide de Chezelles and Steiner, an ugly little knot against which Mme Hugon's elderly and amiable serenity stood out in strange contrast. And Fauchery, having sketched out his article, named this last group "Countess Sabine's little clique."

"On another occasion," continued Steiner in still lower tones, "Léonide got her tenor down to Montauban. She was living in the Château de Beaurecueil, two leagues farther off, and she used to come in daily in a carriage and pair in order to visit him at the Lion d'Or, where he had put up. The carriage used to wait at the door, and Léonide would stay for hours in the house, while a crowd gathered round and looked at the horses."

There was a pause in the talk, and some solemn moments passed silently by in the lofty room. Two young men were whispering, but they ceased in their turn, and the hushed step of Count Muffat was alone audible as he crossed the floor. The lamps seemed to have paled; the fire was going out; a stern shadow fell athwart the old friends of the house where they sat in the chairs they had occupied there for forty years back. It was as though in a momentary pause of conversation the invited guests had become suddenly aware that the count's mother, in all her glacial stateliness, had returned among them.

But the Countess Sabine had once more resumed:

"Well, at last the news of it got about. The young man was likely to die, and that would explain the poor child's adoption of the religious life. Besides, they say that Monsieur de Fougeray would never have given his consent to the marriage."

"They say heaps of other things too," cried Léonide giddily.

She fell a-laughing; she refused to talk. Sabine was won over by this gaiety and put her handkerchief up to her lips. And in the vast and solemn room their laughter sounded a note which struck Fauchery strangely, the note of delicate glass breaking. Assuredly here was the first beginning of the "little rift." Everyone began talking again. Mme du Joncqouy demurred; Mme Chantereau knew for certain that a marriage had been projected but that matters had gone no further; the men even ventured to give their opinions. For some minutes the conversation was a babel of opinions, in which the divers elements of the circle, whether Bonapartist or Legitimist or merely worldly and skeptical, appeared to jostle one another simultaneously. Estelle had rung to order wood to be put on the fire; the footman turned up the lamps; the room seemed to wake from sleep. Fauchery began smiling, as though once more at his ease.

"Egad, they become the brides of God when they couldn't be their cousin's," said Vandeuvres between his teeth.

The subject bored him, and he had rejoined Fauchery.

"My dear fellow, have you ever seen a woman who was really loved become a nun?"

He did not wait for an answer, for he had had enough of the topic, and in a hushed voice:

"Tell me," he said, "how many of us will there be tomorrow? There 'll be the Mignons, Steiner, yourself, Blanche and I; who else?"

"Caroline, I believe, and Simonne and Gaga without doubt. One never knows exactly, does one? On such occasions one expects the party will number twenty, and you're really thirty."

Vandeuvres, who was looking at the ladies, passed abruptly to another subject:

"She must have been very nice-looking, that Du Joncquoy woman, some fifteen years ago. Poor Estelle has grown lankier than ever. What a nice lath to put into a bed!"

But interrupting himself, he returned to the subject of tomorrow's supper.

"What's so tiresome of those shows is that it's always the same set of women. One wants a novelty. Do try and invent a new girl. By Jove, happy thought! I'll go and beseech that stout man to bring the woman he was trotting about the other evening at the Variétés."

He referred to the chief clerk, sound asleep in the middle of the drawing room. Fauchery, afar off, amused himself by following this delicate negotiation. Vandeuvres had sat himself down by the stout man, who still looked very sedate. For some moments they both appeared to be discussing with much propriety the question before the house, which was, "How can one discover the exact state of feeling that urges a young girl to enter into the religious life?" Then the count returned with the remark:

"It's impossible. He swears she's straight. She'd refuse, and yet I would have wagered that I once saw her at Laure's."

"Eh, what? You go to Laure's?" murmured Fauchery with a chuckle. "You venture your reputation in places like that? I was under the impression that it was only we poor devils of outsiders who——"

"Ah, dear boy, one ought to see every side of life."

Then they sneered and with sparkling eyes they compared notes about the table d'hôte in the Rue des Martyrs, where big Laure Piédefer ran a dinner at three francs a head for little women in difficulties. A nice hole, where all the little women used to kiss Laure on the lips! And as the Countess Sabine, who had overheard a stray word or two, turned toward them, they started back, rubbing shoulders in excited merriment. They had not noticed that Georges Hugon was close by and that he was listening to them, blushing so hotly the while that a rosy flush had spread from his ears to his girlish throat. The infant was full of shame and of ecstasy. From the moment his mother had turned him loose in the room he had been hovering in the wake of Mme de Chezelles, the only woman present who struck him as being the thing. But after all is said and done, Nana licked her to fits!

"Yesterday evening," Mme Hugon was saying, "Georges took me to the

play. Yes, we went to the Variétés, where I certainly had not set foot for the last ten years. That child adores music. As to me, I wasn't in the least amused, but he was so happy! They put extraordinary pieces on the stage nowadays. Besides, music delights me very little, I confess."

"What! You don't love music, madame?" cried Mme du Joncquoy, lifting her eyes to heaven. "Is it possible there should be people who don't love music?"

The exclamation of surprise was general. No one had dropped a single word concerning the performance at the Variétés, at which the good Mme Hugon had not understood any of the allusions. The ladies knew the piece but said nothing about it, and with that they plunged into the realm of sentiment and began discussing the masters in a tone of refined and ecstatic admiration. Mme du Joncquoy was not fond of any of them save Weber, while Mme Chantereau stood up for the Italians. The ladies' voices had turned soft and languishing, and in front of the hearth one might have fancied one's self listening in meditative, religious retirement to the faint, discreet music of a little chapel.

"Now let's see," murmured Vandevres, bringing Fauchery back into the middle of the drawing room, "notwithstanding it all, we must invent a woman for tomorrow. Shall we ask Steiner about it?"

"Oh, when Steiner's got hold of a woman," said the journalist, "it's because Paris has done with her."

Vandevres, however, was searching about on every side.

"Wait a bit," he continued, "the other day I met Foucarmont with a charming blonde. I'll go and tell him to bring her."

And he called to Foucarmont. They exchanged a few words rapidly. There must have been some sort of complication, for both of them, moving carefully forward and stepping over the dresses of the ladies, went off in quest of another young man with whom they continued the discussion in the embrasure of a window. Fauchery was left to himself and had just decided to proceed to the hearth, where Mme du Joncquoy was announcing that she never heard Weber played without at the same time seeing lakes, forests and sunrises over landscapes steeped in dew, when a hand touched his shoulder and a voice behind him remarked:

"It's not civil of you."

"What d'you mean?" he asked, turning round and recognizing La Faloise.

"Why, about that supper tomorrow. You might easily have got me invited."

Fauchery was at length about to state his reasons when Vandevres came back to tell him:

"It appears it isn't a girl of Foucarmont's. It's that man's flame out there. She won't be able to come. What a piece of bad luck! But all the same I've pressed Foucarmont into the service, and he's going to try to get Louise from the Palais-Royal."

"Is it not true, Monsieur de Vandevres," asked Mme Chantereau, raising her voice, "that Wagner's music was hissed last Sunday?"

"Oh, frightfully, madame," he made answer, coming forward with his usual exquisite politeness.

Then, as they did not detain him, he moved off and continued whispering in the journalist's ear:

"I'm going to press some more of them. These young fellows must know some little ladies."

With that he was observed to accost men and to engage them in conversation in his usual amiable and smiling way in every corner of the drawing room. He mixed with the various groups, said something confidently to everyone and walked away again with a sly wink and a secret signal or two. It looked as though he were giving out a watchword in that easy way of his. The news went round; the place of meeting was announced, while the ladies' sentimental dissertations on music served to conceal the small, feverish rumor of these recruiting operations.

"No, do not speak of your Germans," Mme Chantereau was saying. "Song is gaiety; song is light. Have you heard Patti in the *Barber of Seville*?"

"She was delicious!" murmured Léonide, who strummed none but operatic airs on her piano.

Meanwhile the Countess Sabine had rung. When on Tuesdays the number of visitors was small, tea was handed round the drawing room itself. While directing a footman to clear a round table the countess followed the Count de Vandevres with her eyes. She still smiled that vague smile which slightly disclosed her white teeth, and as the count passed she questioned him.

"What *are* you plotting, Monsieur de Vandevres?"

"What am I plotting, madame?" he answered quietly. "Nothing at all."

"Really! I saw you so busy. Pray, wait, you shall make yourself useful!"

She placed an album in his hands and asked him to put it on the piano. But he found means to inform Fauchery in a low whisper that they would have Tatan Néné, the most finely developed girl that winter, and Maria Blond, the same who had just made her first appearance at the Folies-Dramatiques. Meanwhile La Faloise stopped him at every step in hopes of receiving an invitation. He ended by offering himself, and Vandevres engaged him in the plot at once; only he made him promise to bring Clarisse with him, and when La Faloise pretended to scruple about certain points he quieted him by the remark:

"Since I invite you that's enough!"

Nevertheless, La Faloise would have much liked to know the name of the hostess. But the countess had recalled Vandevres and was questioning him as to the manner in which the English made tea. He often betook himself to England, where his horses ran. Then as though he had been inwardly following up quite a laborious train of thought during his remarks, he broke in with the question:

"And the marquis, by the by? Are we not to see him?"

"Oh, certainly you will! My father made me a formal promise that he would come," replied the countess. "But I'm beginning to be anxious. His duties will have kept him."

Vandevres smiled a discreet smile. He, too, seemed to have his doubts as to the exact nature of the Marquis de Chouard's duties. Indeed, he had been

thinking of a pretty woman whom the marquis occasionally took into the country with him. Perhaps they could get her too.

In the meantime Fauchery decided that the moment had come in which to risk giving Count Muffat his invitation. The evening, in fact, was drawing to a close.

"Are you serious?" asked Vandevvres, who thought a joke was intended.

"Extremely serious. If I don't execute my commission she'll tear my eyes out. It's a case of landing her fish, you know."

"Well then, I'll help you, dear boy."

Eleven o'clock struck. Assisted by her daughter, the countess was pouring out the tea, and as hardly any guests save intimate friends had come, the cups and the platefuls of little cakes were being circulated without ceremony. Even the ladies did not leave their armchairs in front of the fire and sat sipping their tea and nibbling cakes which they held between their finger tips. From music the talk had declined to purveyors. Boissier was the only person for sweetmeats and Catherine for ices. Mme Chantereau, however, was all for Latinville. Speech grew more and more indolent, and a sense of lassitude was lulling the room to sleep. Steiner had once more set himself secretly to undermine the deputy, whom he held in a state of blockade in the corner of a settee. M. Venot, whose teeth must have been ruined by sweet things, was eating little dry cakes, one after the other, with a small nibbling sound suggestive of a mouse, while the chief clerk, his nose in a teacup, seemed never to be going to finish its contents. As to the countess, she went in a leisurely way from one guest to another, never pressing them, indeed, only pausing a second or two before the gentlemen whom she viewed with an air of dumb interrogation before she smiled and passed on. The great fire had flushed all her face, and she looked as if she were the sister of her daughter, who appeared so withered and ungainly at her side. When she drew near Fauchery, who was chatting with her husband and Vandevvres, she noticed that they grew suddenly silent; accordingly she did not stop but handed the cup of tea she was offering to Georges Hugon beyond them.

"It's a lady who desires your company at supper," the journalist gaily continued, addressing Count Muffat.

The last-named, whose face had worn its gray look all the evening, seemed very much surprised. What lady was it?

"Oh, Nana!" said Vandevvres, by way of forcing the invitation.

The count became more grave than before. His eyelids trembled just perceptibly, while a look of discomfort, such as headache produces, hovered for a moment athwart his forehead.

"But I'm not acquainted with that lady," he murmured.

"Come, come, you went to her house," remarked Vandevvres.

"What d'you say? I went to her house? Oh yes, the other day, in behalf of the Benevolent Organization. I had forgotten about it. But, no matter, I am not acquainted with her, and I cannot accept."

He had adopted an icy expression in order to make them understand that this jest did not appear to him to be in good taste. A man of his position did

not sit down at tables of such women as that. Vandeuvres protested: it was to be a supper party of dramatic and artistic people, and talent excused everything. But without listening further to the arguments urged by Fauchery, who spoke of a dinner where the Prince of Scots, the son of a queen, had sat down beside an ex-music-hall singer, the count only emphasized his refusal. In so doing, he allowed himself, despite his great politeness, to be guilty of an irritated gesture.

Georges and La Faloise, standing in front of each other drinking their tea, had overheard the two or three phrases exchanged in their immediate neighborhood.

"Jove, it's at Nana's then," murmured La Faloise. "I might have expected as much!"

Georges said nothing, but he was all aflame. His fair hair was in disorder; his blue eyes shone like tapers, so fiercely had the vice, which for some days past had surrounded him, inflamed and stirred his blood. At last he was going to plunge into all that he had dreamed of!

"I don't know the address," La Faloise resumed.

"She lives on a third floor in the Boulevard Haussmann, between the Rue de l'Arcade and the Rue Pesquier," said Georges all in a breath.

And when the other looked at him in much astonishment, he added, turning very red and fit to sink into the ground with embarrassment and conceit:

"I'm of the party. She invited me this morning."

But there was a great stir in the drawing room, and Vandeuvres and Fauchery could not continue pressing the count. The Marquis de Chouard had just come in, and everyone was anxious to greet him. He had moved painfully forward, his legs failing under him, and he now stood in the middle of the room with pallid face and eyes blinking, as though he had just come out of some dark alley and were blinded by the brightness of the lamps.

"I scarcely hoped to see you tonight, Father," said the countess. "I should have been anxious till the morning."

He looked at her without answering, as a man might who fails to understand. His nose, which loomed immense on his shorn face, looked like a swollen pimple, while his lower lip hung down. Seeing him such a wreck, Mme Hugon, full of kind compassion, said pitying things to him.

"You work too hard. You ought to rest yourself. At our age we ought to leave work to the young people."

"Work! Ah yes, to be sure, work!" he stammered at last. "Always plenty of work."

He began to pull himself together, straightening up his bent figure and passing his hand, as was his wont, over his scant gray hair, of which a few locks strayed behind his ears.

"At what are you working as late as this?" asked Mme du Joncquoy. "I thought you were at the financial minister's reception?"

But the countess intervened with:

"My father had to study the question of a projected law."

"Yes, a projected law," he said; "exactly so, a projected law. I shut myself

up for that reason. It refers to work in factories, and I was anxious for a proper observance of the Lord's day of rest. It is really shameful that the government is unwilling to act with vigor in the matter. Churches are growing empty; we are running headlong to ruin."

Vandeuvres had exchanged glances with Fauchery. They both happened to be behind the marquis, and they were scanning him suspiciously. When Vandeuvres found an opportunity to take him aside and to speak to him about the good-looking creature he was in the habit of taking down into the country, the old man affected extreme surprise. Perhaps someone had seen him with the Baroness Decker, at whose house at Viroflay he sometimes spent a day or so. Vandeuvres's sole vengeance was an abrupt question:

"Tell me, where have you been straying to? Your elbow is covered with cobwebs and plaster."

"My elbow," he muttered, slightly disturbed. "Yes indeed, it's true. A speck or two, I must have come in for them on my way down from my office."

Several people were taking their departure. It was close on midnight. Two footmen were noiselessly removing the empty cups and the plates with cakes. In front of the hearth the ladies had re-formed and, at the same time, narrowed their circle and were chatting more carelessly than before in the languid atmosphere peculiar to the close of a party. The very room was going to sleep, and slowly creeping shadows were cast by its walls. It was then Fauchery spoke of departure. Yet he once more forgot his intention at sight of the Countess Sabine. She was resting from her cares as hostess, and as she sat in her wonted seat, silent, her eyes fixed on a log which was turning into embers, her face appeared so white and so impassable that doubt again possessed him. In the glow of the fire the small black hairs on the mole at the corner of her lip became white. It was Nana's very mole, down to the color of the hair. He could not refrain from whispering something about it in Vandeuvres's ear. Gad, it was true; the other had never noticed it before. And both men continued this comparison of Nana and the countess. They discovered a vague resemblance about the chin and the mouth, but the eyes were not at all alike. Then, too, Nana had a good-natured expression, while with the countess it was hard to decide—she might have been a cat, sleeping with claws withdrawn and paws stirred by a scarce-perceptible nervous quiver.

"All the same, one could have her," declared Fauchery.

Vandeuvres stripped her at a glance.

"Yes, one could, all the same," he said. "But I think nothing of the thighs, you know. Will you bet she has no thighs?"

He stopped, for Fauchery touched him briskly on the arm and showed him Estelle, sitting close to them on her footstool. They had raised their voices without noticing her, and she must have overheard them. Nevertheless, she continued sitting there stiff and motionless, not a hair having lifted on her thin neck, which was that of a girl who has shot up all too quickly. Thereupon they retired three or four paces, and Vandeuvres vowed that the countess was a very honest woman. Just then voices were raised in front of the hearth. Mme du Joncquoy was saying:

"I was willing to grant you that Monsieur de Bismarck was perhaps a witty man. Only, if you go as far as to talk of genius——"

The ladies had come round again to their earliest topic of conversation.

"What the deuce! Still Monsieur de Bismarck!" muttered Fauchery. "This time I make my escape for good and all."

"Wait a bit," said Vandeuves, "we must have a definite no from the count."

The Count Muffat was talking to his father-in-law and a certain serious-looking gentleman. Vandeuves drew him away and renewed the invitation, backing it up with the information that he was to be at the supper himself. A man might go anywhere; no one could think of suspecting evil where at most there could only be curiosity. The count listened to these arguments with downcast eyes and expressionless face. Vandeuves felt him to be hesitating when the Marquis de Chouard approached with a look of interrogation. And when the latter was informed of the question in hand and Fauchery had invited him in his turn, he looked at his son-in-law furtively. There ensued an embarrassed silence, but both men encouraged one another and would doubtless have ended by accepting had not Count Muffat perceived M. Venot's gaze fixed upon him. The little old man was no longer smiling; his face was cadaverous, his eyes bright and keen as steel.

"No," replied the count directly, in so decisive a tone that further insistence became impossible.

Then the marquis refused with even greater severity of expression. He talked morality. The aristocratic classes ought to set a good example. Fauchery smiled and shook hands with Vandeuves. He did not wait for him and took his departure immediately, for he was due at his newspaper office.

"At Nana's at midnight, eh?"

La Faloise retired too. Steiner had made his bow to the countess. Other men followed them, and the same phrase went round—"At midnight, at Nana's"—as they went to get their overcoats in the anteroom. Georges, who could not leave without his mother, had stationed himself at the door, where he gave the exact address. "Third floor, door on your left." Yet before going out Fauchery gave a final glance. Vandeuves had again resumed his position among the ladies and was laughing with Léonide de Chezelles. Count Muffat and the Marquis de Chouard were joining in the conversation, while the good Mme Hugon was falling asleep open-eyed. Lost among the petticoats, M. Venot was his own small self again and smiled as of old. Twelve struck slowly in the great solemn room.

"What—what do you mean?" Mme du Joncqoy resumed. "You imagine that Monsieur de Bismarck will make war on us and beat us! Oh, that's unbearable!"

Indeed, they were laughing round Mme Chantereau, who had just repeated an assertion she had heard made in Alsace, where her husband owned a foundry.

"We have the emperor, fortunately," said Count Muffat in his grave, official way.

It was the last phrase Fauchery was able to catch. He closed the door after

casting one more glance in the direction of the Countess Sabine. She was talking sedately with the chief clerk and seemed to be interested in that stout individual's conversation. Assuredly he must have been deceiving himself. There was no "little rift" there at all. It was a pity.

"You're not coming down then?" La Faloise shouted up to him from the entrance hall.

And out on the pavement, as they separated, they once more repeated:

"Tomorrow, at Nana's."

CHAPTER IV

SINCE MORNING Zoé had delivered up the flat to a managing man who had come from Brebant's with a staff of helpers and waiters. Brebant was to supply everything, from the supper, the plates and dishes, the glass, the linen, the flowers, down to the seats and footstools. Nana could not have mustered a dozen napkins out of all her cupboards, and not having had time to get a proper outfit after her new start in life and scorning to go to the restaurant, she had decided to make the restaurant come to her. It struck her as being more the thing. She wanted to celebrate her great success as an actress with a supper which should set people talking. As her dining room was too small, the manager had arranged the table in the drawing room, a table with twenty-five covers, placed somewhat close together.

"Is everything ready?" asked Nana when she returned at midnight.

"Oh! I don't know," replied Zoé roughly, looking beside herself with worry. "The Lord be thanked, I don't bother about anything. They're making a fearful mess in the kitchen and all over the flat! I've had to fight my battles too. The other two came again. My eye! I did just chuck 'em out!"

She referred, of course, to her employer's old admirers, the tradesman and the Walachian, to whom Nana, sure of her future and longing to shed her skin, as she phrased it, had decided to give the go-by.

"There are a couple of leeches for you!" she muttered.

"If they come back threaten to go to the police."

Then she called Daguenet and Georges, who had remained behind in the anteroom, where they were hanging up their overcoats. They had both met at the stage door in the Passage des Panoramas, and she had brought them home with her in a cab. As there was nobody there yet, she shouted to them to come into the dressing room while Zoé was touching up her toilet. Hurriedly and without changing her dress she had her hair done up and stuck white roses in her chignon and at her bosom. The little room was littered with the drawing-room furniture, which the workmen had been compelled to roll in there, and it was full of a motley assemblage of round tables, sofas and arm-chairs, with their legs in air for the most part. Nana was quite ready when her dress caught on a castor and tore upward. At this she swore furiously; such things only happened to her! Ragingly she took off her dress, a very simple affair of white foulard, of so thin and supple a texture that it clung about her

like a long shift. But she put it on again directly, for she could not find another to her taste, and with tears in her eyes declared that she was dressed like a ragpicker. Daguenet and Georges had to patch up the rent with pins, while Zoé once more arranged her hair. All three hurried round her, especially the boy, who knelt on the floor with his hands among her skirts. And at last she calmed down again when Daguenet assured her it could not be later than a quarter past twelve, seeing that by dint of scamping her words and skipping her lines she had effectually shortened the third act of the *Blonde Venus*.

"The play's still far too good for that crowd of idiots," she said. "Did you see? There were thousands there tonight. Zoé, my girl, you will wait in here. Don't go to bed, I shall want you. By gum, it is time they came. Here's company!"

She ran off while Georges stayed where he was with the skirts of his coat brushing the floor. He blushed, seeing Daguenet looking at him. Notwithstanding which, they had conceived a tender regard the one for the other. They rearranged the bows of their cravats in front of the big dressing glass and gave each other a mutual dose of the clothesbrush, for they were all white from their close contact with Nana.

"One would think it was sugar," murmured Georges, giggling like a greedy little child.

A footman hired for the evening was ushering the guests into the small drawing room, a narrow slip of a place in which only four armchairs had been left in order the better to pack in the company. From the large drawing room beyond came a sound as of the moving of plates and silver, while a clear and brilliant ray of light shone from under the door. At her entrance Nana found Clarisse Besnus, whom La Faloise had brought, already installed in one of the armchairs.

"Dear me, you're the first of 'em!" said Nana, who, now that she was successful, treated her familiarly.

"Oh, it's his doing," replied Clarisse. "He's always afraid of not getting anywhere in time. If I'd taken him at his word I shouldn't have waited to take off my paint and my wig."

The young man, who now saw Nana for the first time, bowed, paid her a compliment and spoke of his cousin, hiding his agitation behind an exaggeration of politeness. But Nana, neither listening to him nor recognizing his face, shook hands with him and then went briskly toward Rose Mignon, with whom she at once assumed a most distinguished manner.

"Ah, how nice of you, my dear madame! I was so anxious to have you here!"

"It's I who am charmed, I assure you," said Rose with equal amiability.

"Pray, sit down. Do you require anything?"

"Thank you, no! Ah yes, I've left my fan in my pelisse, Steiner; just look in the right-hand pocket."

Steiner and Mignon had come in behind Rose. The banker turned back and reappeared with the fan while Mignon embraced Nana fraternally and forced Rose to do so also. Did they not all belong to the same family in the theatrical

world? Then he winked as though to encourage Steiner, but the latter was disconcerted by Rose's clear gaze and contented himself by kissing Nana's hand.

Just then the Count de Vandevres made his appearance with Blanche de Sivry. There was an interchange of profound bows, and Nana with the utmost ceremony conducted Blanche to an armchair. Meanwhile Vandevres told them laughingly that Fauchery was engaged in a dispute at the foot of the stairs because the porter had refused to allow Lucy Stewart's carriage to come in at the gate. They could hear Lucy telling the porter he was a dirty black-guard in the anteroom. But when the footman had opened the door she came forward with her laughing grace of manner, announced her name herself, took both Nana's hands in hers and told her that she had liked her from the very first and considered her talent splendid. Nana, puffed up by her novel role of hostess, thanked her and was veritably confused. Nevertheless, from the moment of Fauchery's arrival she appeared preoccupied, and directly she could get near him she asked him in a low voice:

"Will he come?"

"No, he did not want to," was the journalist's abrupt reply, for he was taken by surprise, though he had got ready some sort of tale to explain Count Muffat's refusal.

Seeing the young woman's sudden pallor, he became conscious of his folly and tried to retract his words.

"He was unable to; he is taking the countess to the ball at the Ministry of the Interior tonight."

"All right," murmured Nana, who suspected him of ill will, "you'll pay me out for that, my pippin."

She turned on her heel, and so did he; they were angry. Just then Mignon was pushing Steiner up against Nana, and when Fauchery had left her he said to her in a low voice and with the good-natured cynicism of a comrade in arms who wishes his friends to be happy:

"He's dying of it, you know, only he's afraid of my wife. Won't you protect him?"

Nana did not appear to understand. She smiled and looked at Rose, the husband and the banker and finally said to the latter:

"Monsieur Steiner, you will sit next to me."

With that there came from the anteroom a sound of laughter and whispering and a burst of merry, chattering voices, which sounded as if a runaway convent were on the premises. And Labordette appeared, towing five women in his rear, his boarding school, as Lucy Stewart cruelly phrased it. There was Gaga, majestic in a blue velvet dress which was too tight for her, and Caroline Héquet, clad as usual in ribbed black silk, trimmed with Chantilly lace. Léa de Horn came next, terribly dressed up, as her wont was, and after her the big Tatan Néné, a good-humored fair girl with the bosom of a wet nurse, at which people laughed, and finally little Maria Blond, a young damsel of fifteen, as thin and vicious as a street child, yet on the high road to success, owing to her recent first appearance at the Folies. Labordette had brought

the whole collection in a single fly, and they were still laughing at the way they had been squeezed with Maria Blond on her knees. But on entering the room they pursed up their lips, and all grew very conventional as they shook hands and exchanged salutations. Gaga even affected the infantile and lisped through excess of genteel deportment. Tatan Néné alone transgressed. They had been telling her as they came along that six absolutely naked Negroes would serve up Nana's supper, and she now grew anxious about them and asked to see them. Labordette called her a goose and besought her to be silent.

"And Bordenave?" asked Fauchery.

"Oh, you may imagine how miserable I am," cried Nana; "he won't be able to join us."

"Yes," said Rose Mignon, "his foot caught in a trap door, and he's got a fearful sprain. If only you could hear him swearing, with his leg tied up and laid out on a chair!"

Thereupon everybody mourned over Bordenave's absence. No one ever gave a good supper without Bordenave. Ah well, they would try and do without him, and they were already talking about other matters when a burly voice was heard:

"What, eh, what? Is that the way they're going to write my obituary notice?"

There was a shout, and all heads were turned round, for it was indeed Bordenave. Huge and fiery-faced, he was standing with his stiff leg in the doorway, leaning for support on Simonne Cabiroche's shoulder. Simonne was for the time being his mistress. This little creature had had a certain amount of education and could play the piano and talk English. She was a blonde on a tiny, pretty scale and so delicately formed that she seemed to bend under Bordenave's rude weight. Yet she was smilingly submissive withal. He postured there for some moments, for he felt that together they formed a tableau.

"One can't help liking ye, eh?" he continued. "Zounds, I was afraid I should get bored, and I said to myself, 'Here goes.'"

But he interrupted himself with an oath.

"Oh, damn!"

Simonne had taken a step too quickly forward, and his foot had just felt his full weight. He gave her a rough push, but she, still smiling away and ducking her pretty head as some animal might that is afraid of a beating, held him up with all the strength a little plump blonde can command. Amid all these exclamations there was a rush to his assistance. Nana and Rose Mignon rolled up an armchair, into which Bordenave let himself sink, while the other women slid a second one under his leg. And with that all the actresses present kissed him as a matter of course. He kept grumbling and gasping.

"Oh, damn! Oh, damn! Ah well, the stomach's unhurt, you'll see."

Other guests had arrived by this time, and motion became impossible in the room. The noise of clinking plates and silver had ceased, and now a dispute was heard going on in the big drawing room, where the voice of the manager grumbled angrily. Nana was growing impatient, for she expected no more invited guests and wondered why they did not bring in supper. She had just

sent Georges to find out what was going on when, to her great surprise, she noticed the arrival of more guests, both male and female. She did not know them in the least. Whereupon with some embarrassment she questioned Bordenave, Mignon and Labordette about them. They did not know them any more than she did, but when she turned to the Count de Vandevres he seemed suddenly to recollect himself. They were the young men he had pressed into her service at Count Muffat's. Nana thanked him. That was capital, capital! Only they would all be terribly crowded, and she begged Labordette to go and have seven more covers set. Scarcely had he left the room than the footman ushered in three newcomers. Nay, this time the thing was becoming ridiculous; one certainly could never take them all in. Nana was beginning to grow angry and in her haughtiest manner announced that such conduct was scarcely in good taste. But seeing two more arrive, she began laughing; it was really too funny. So much the worse. People would have to fit in anyhow! The company were all on their feet save Gaga and Rose and Bordenave, who alone took up two armchairs. There was a buzz of voices, people talking in low tones and stifling slight yawns the while.

"Now what d'you say, my lass," asked Bordenave, "to our sitting down at table as if nothing had happened? We are all here, don't you think?"

"Oh yes, we're all here, I promise you!" she answered laughingly.

She looked round her but grew suddenly serious, as though she were surprised at not finding someone. Doubtless there was a guest missing whom she did not mention. It was a case of waiting. But a minute or two later the company noticed in their midst a tall gentleman with a fine face and a beautiful white beard. The most astonishing thing about it was that nobody had seen him come in; indeed, he must have slipped into the little drawing room through the bedroom door, which had remained ajar. Silence reigned, broken only by a sound of whispering. The Count de Vandevres certainly knew who the gentleman was, for they both exchanged a discreet handgrip, but to the questions which the women asked him he replied by a smile only. Thereupon Caroline Héquet wagged in a low voice that it was an English lord who was on the eve of returning to London to be married. She knew him quite well—she had had him. And this account of the matter went the round of the ladies present, Maria Blond alone asserting that, for her part, she recognized a German ambassador. She could prove it, because he often passed the night with one of her friends. Among the men his measure was taken in a few rapid phrases. A real swell, to judge by his looks! Perhaps he would pay for the supper! Most likely. It looked like it. Bah! Provided only the supper was a good one! In the end the company remained undecided. Nay, they were already beginning to forget the old white-bearded gentleman when the manager opened the door of the large drawing room.

"Supper is on the table, madame."

Nana had already accepted Steiner's proffered arm without noticing a movement on the part of the old gentleman, who started to walk behind her in solitary state. Thus the march past could not be organized, and men and women entered anyhow, joking with homely good humor over this absence of cere-

mony. A long table stretched from one end to the other of the great room, which had been entirely cleared of furniture, and this same table was not long enough, for the plates thereon were touching one another. Four candelabra, with ten candles apiece, lit up the supper, and of these one was gorgeous in silver plate with sheaves of flowers to right and left of it. Everything was luxurious after the restaurant fashion; the china was ornamented with a gold line and lacked the customary monogram; the silver had become worn and tarnished through dint of continual washings; the glass was of the kind that you can complete an odd set of in any cheap emporium.

The scene suggested a premature housewarming in an establishment newly smiled on by fortune and as yet lacking the necessary conveniences. There was no central luster, and the candelabra, whose tall tapers had scarcely burned up properly, cast a pale yellow light among the dishes and stands on which fruit, cakes and preserves alternated symmetrically.

"You sit where you like, you know," said Nana. "It's more amusing that way."

She remained standing midway down the side of the table. The old gentleman whom nobody knew had placed himself on her right, while she kept Steiner on her left hand. Some guests were already sitting down when the sound of oaths came from the little drawing room. It was Bordenave. The company had forgotten him, and he was having all the trouble in the world to raise himself out of his two armchairs, for he was howling amain and calling for that cat of a Simonne, who had slipped off with the rest. The women ran in to him, full of pity for his woes, and Bordenave appeared, supported, nay, almost carried, by Caroline, Clarisse, Tatan Néné and Maria Blond. And there was much to-do over his installation at the table.

"In the middle, facing Nana!" was the cry. "Bordenave in the middle! He'll be our president!"

Thereupon the ladies seated him in the middle. But he needed a second chair for his leg, and two girls lifted it up and stretched it carefully out. It wouldn't matter; he would eat sideways.

"God blast it all!" he grumbled. "We're squashed all the same! Ah, my kittens, Papa recommends himself to your tender care!"

He had Rose Mignon on his right and Lucy Stewart on his left hand, and they promised to take good care of him. Everybody was now getting settled. Count de Vandevres placed himself between Lucy and Clarisse; Fauchery between Rose Mignon and Caroline Héquet. On the other side of the table Hector de la Faloise had rushed to get next Gaga, and that despite the calls of Clarisse opposite, while Mignon, who never deserted Steiner, was only separated from him by Blanche and had Tatan Néné on his left. Then came Labordette and, finally, at the two ends of the table were irregular crowding groups of young men and of women, such as Simonne, Léa de Horn and Maria Blond. It was in this region that Daguenet and Georges forgathered more warmly than ever while smilingly gazing at Nana.

Nevertheless, two people remained standing, and there was much joking about it. The men offered seats on their knees. Clarisse, who could not move

her elbows, told Vandeuvres that she counted on him to feed her. And then that Bordenave did just take up space with his chairs! There was a final effort, and at last everybody was seated, but, as Mignon loudly remarked, they were confoundedly like herrings in a barrel.

"Thick asparagus soup *à la comtesse*, clear soup *à la Deslignac*," murmured the waiters, carrying about platefuls in rear of the guests.

Bordenave was loudly recommending the thick soup when a shout arose, followed by protests and indignant exclamations. The door had just opened, and three late arrivals, a woman and two men, had just come in. Oh dear, no! There was no space for them! Nana, however, without leaving her chair, began screwing up her eyes in the effort to find out whether she knew them. The woman was Louise Violaine, but she had never seen the men before.

"This gentleman, my dear," said Vandeuvres, "is a friend of mine, a naval officer, Monsieur de Foucarmont by name. I invited him."

Foucarmont bowed and seemed very much at ease, for he added:

"And I took leave to bring one of my friends with me."

"Oh, it's quite right, quite right!" said Nana. "Sit down, pray. Let's see, you—Clarisse—push up a little. You're a good deal spread out down there. That's it—where there's a will—"

They crowded more tightly than ever, and Foucarmont and Louise were given a little stretch of table, but the friend had to sit at some distance from his plate and ate his supper through dint of making a long arm between his neighbors' shoulders. The waiters took away the soup plates and circulated rissoles of young rabbit with truffles and "niokys" and powdered cheese. Bordenave agitated the whole table with the announcement that at one moment he had had the idea of bringing with him Prullière, Fontan and old Bosc. At this Nana looked sedate and remarked dryly that she would have given them a pretty reception. Had she wanted colleagues, she would certainly have undertaken to ask them herself. No, no, she wouldn't have third-rate play actors. Old Bosc was always drunk; Prullière was fond of spitting too much, and as to Fontan, he made himself unbearable in society with his loud voice and his stupid doings. Then, you know, third-rate play actors were always out of place when they found themselves in the society of gentlemen such as those around her.

"Yes, yes, it's true," Mignon declared.

All round the table the gentlemen in question looked unimpeachable in the extreme, what with their evening dress and their pale features, the natural distinction of which was still further refined by fatigue. The old gentleman was as deliberate in his movements and wore as subtle a smile as though he were presiding over a diplomatic congress, and Vandeuvres, with his exquisite politeness toward the ladies next to him, seemed to be at one of the Countess Muffat's receptions. That very morning Nana had been remarking to her aunt that in the matter of men one could not have done better—they were all either wellborn or wealthy, in fact, quite the thing. And as to the ladies, they were behaving admirably. Some of them, such as Blanche, Léa and Louise, had come in low dresses, but Gaga's only was perhaps a little too low, the more so

because at her age she would have done well not to show her neck at all. Now that the company were finally settled the laughter and the light jests began to fail. Georges was under the impression that he had assisted at merrier dinner parties among the good folks of Orleans. There was scarcely any conversation. The men, not being mutually acquainted, stared at one another, while the women sat quite quiet, and it was this which especially surprised Georges. He thought them all smugs—he had been under the impression that everybody would begin kissing at once.

The third course, consisting of a Rhine carp *à la Chambord* and a saddle of venison *à l'anglaise*, was being served when Blanche remarked aloud:

"Lucy, my dear, I met your Ollivier on Sunday. How he's grown!"

"Dear me, yes! He's eighteen," replied Lucy. "It doesn't make me feel any younger. He went back to his school yesterday."

Her son Ollivier, whom she was wont to speak of with pride, was a pupil at the Ecole de Marine. Then ensued a conversation about the young people, during which all the ladies waxed very tender. Nana described her own great happiness. Her baby, the little Louis, she said, was now at the house of her aunt, who brought him round to her every morning at eleven o'clock, when she would take him into her bed, where he played with her griffon dog Lulu. It was enough to make one die of laughing to see them both burying themselves under the clothes at the bottom of the bed. The company had no idea how cunning Louiset had already become.

"Oh, yesterday I did just pass a day!" said Rose Mignon in her turn. "Just imagine, I went to fetch Charles and Henry at their boarding school, and I had positively to take them to the theater at night. They jumped; they clapped their little hands: 'We shall see Mamma act! We shall see Mamma act!' Oh, it was a to-do!"

Mignon smiled complaisantly, his eyes moist with paternal tenderness.

"And at the play itself," he continued, "they were so funny! They behaved as seriously as grown men, devoured Rose with their eyes and asked me why Mamma had her legs bare like that."

The whole table began laughing, and Mignon looked radiant, for his pride as a father was flattered. He adored his children and had but one object in life, which was to increase their fortunes by administering the money gained by Rose at the theater and elsewhere with the businesslike severity of a faithful steward. When as first fiddle in the music hall where she used to sing he had married her, they had been passionately fond of one another. Now they were good friends. There was an understanding between them: she labored hard to the full extent of her talent and of her beauty; he had given up his violin in order the better to watch over her successes as an actress and as a woman. One could not have found a more homely and united household anywhere!

"What age is your eldest?" asked Vandeuvres.

"Henry's nine," replied Mignon, "but such a big chap for his years!"

Then he chaffed Steiner, who was not fond of children, and with quiet audacity informed him that were he a father, he would make a less stupid hash of his fortune. While talking he watched the banker over Blanche's

shoulders to see if it was coming off with Nana. But for some minutes Rose and Fauchery, who were talking very near him, had been getting on his nerves. Was Rose going to waste time over such a folly as that? In that sort of case, by Jove, he blocked the way. And diamond on finger and with his fine hands in great evidence, he finished discussing a fillet of venison.

Elsewhere the conversation about children continued. La Faloise, rendered very restless by the immediate proximity of Gaga, asked news of her daughter, whom he had had the pleasure of noticing in her company at the Variétés. Lili was quite well, but she was still such a tomboy! He was astonished to learn that Lili was entering on her nineteenth year. Gaga became even more imposing in his eyes, and when he endeavored to find out why she had not brought Lili with her:

"Oh no, no, never!" she said stiffly. "Not three months ago she positively insisted on leaving her boarding school. I was thinking of marrying her off at once, but she loves me so that I had to take her home—oh, so much against my will!"

Her blue eyelids with their blackened lashes blinked and wavered while she spoke of the business of settling her young lady. If at her time of life she hadn't laid by a sou but was still always working to minister to men's pleasures, especially those very young men, whose grandmother she might well be, it was truly because she considered a good match of far greater importance than mere savings. And with that she leaned over La Faloise, who reddened under the huge, naked, plastered shoulder with which she well-nigh crushed him.

"You know," she murmured, "if she fails it won't be my fault. But they're so strange when they're young!"

There was a considerable bustle round the table, and the waiters became very active. After the third course the entrees had made their appearance; they consisted of pullets *à la maréchale*, fillets of sole with shallot sauce and *escalopes* of Strasbourg *pâté*. The manager, who till then had been having Meursault served, now offered Chambertin and Léoville. Amid the slight hubbub which the change of plates involved Georges, who was growing momentarily more astonished, asked Daguenet if all the ladies present were similarly provided with children, and the other, who was amused by this question, gave him some further details. Lucy Stewart was the daughter of a man of English origin who greased the wheels of the trains at the Gare du Nord; she was thirty-nine years old and had the face of a horse but was adorable withal and, though consumptive, never died. In fact, she was the smartest woman there and represented three princes and a duke. Caroline Héquet, born at Bordeaux, daughter of a little clerk long since dead of shame, was lucky enough to be possessed of a mother with a head on her shoulders, who, after having cursed her, had made it up again at the end of a year of reflection, being minded, at any rate, to save a fortune for her daughter. The latter was twenty-five years old and very passionless and was held to be one of the finest women it is possible to enjoy. Her price never varied. The mother, a model of orderliness, kept the accounts and noted down receipts and expenditures with severe precision. She managed the whole household from some small lodging two stories

above her daughter's, where, moreover, she had established a workroom for dressmaking and plain sewing. As to Blanche de Sivry, whose real name was Jacqueline Bandu, she hailed from a village near Amiens. Magnificent in person, stupid and untruthful in character, she gave herself out as the granddaughter of a general and never owned to her thirty-two summers. The Russians had a great taste for her, owing to her *embonpoint*. Then Daguenet added a rapid word or two about the rest. There was Clarisse Besnus, whom a lady had brought up from Saint-Aubin-sur-Mer in the capacity of maid while the lady's husband had started her in quite another line. There was Simonne Cabiroche, the daughter of a furniture dealer in the Faubourg Saint-Antoine, who had been educated in a large boarding school with a view to becoming a governess. Finally there were Maria Blond and Louise Violaine and Léa de Horn, who had all shot up to woman's estate on the pavements of Paris, not to mention Tatan Néné, who had herded cows in Champagne till she was twenty.

Georges listened and looked at these ladies, feeling dizzy and excited by the coarse recital thus crudely whispered in his ear, while behind his chair the waiters kept repeating in respectful tones:

"Pullets à la maréchale; filets of sole with ravigote sauce."

"My dear fellow," said Daguenet, giving him the benefit of his experience, "don't take any fish; it'll do you no good at this time of night. And be content with Léoville: it's less treacherous."

A heavy warmth floated upward from the candelabras, from the dishes which were being handed round, from the whole table where thirty-eight human beings were suffocating. And the waiters forgot themselves and ran when crossing the carpet, so that it was spotted with grease. Nevertheless, the supper grew scarce any merrier. The ladies trifled with their meat, left half of it uneaten. Tatan Néné alone partook gluttonously of every dish. At that advance hour of the night hunger was of the nervous order only, a mere whimsical craving born of an exasperated stomach.

At Nana's side the old gentleman refused every dish offered him; he had only taken a spoonful of soup, and he now sat in front of his empty plate, gazing silently about. There was some subdued yawning, and occasionally eyelids closed and faces became haggard and white. It was unutterably slow, as it always was, according to Vandeuvres's dictum. This sort of supper should be served anyhow if it was to be funny, he opined. Otherwise when elegantly and conventionally done you might as well feed in good society, where you were not more bored than here. Had it not been for Bordenave, who was still bawling away, everybody would have fallen asleep. That rum old buffer Bordenave, with his leg duly stretched on its chair, was letting his neighbors, Lucy and Rose, wait on him as though he were a sultan. They were entirely taken up with him, and they helped him and pampered him and watched over his glass and his plate, and yet that did not prevent his complaining.

"Who's going to cut up my meat for me? I can't; the table's a league away."

Every few seconds Simonne rose and took up a position behind his back in order to cut his meat and his bread. All the women took a great interest in the things he ate. The waiters were recalled, and he was stuffed to suffocation.

Simonne having wiped his mouth for him while Rose and Lucy were changing his plate, her act struck him as very pretty and, deigning at length to show contentment:

"There, there, my daughter," he said, "that's as it should be. Women are made for that!"

There was a slight reawakening, and conversation became general as they finished discussing some orange sherbet. The hot roast was a fillet with truffles, and the cold roast a galantine of guinea fowl in jelly. Nana, annoyed by the want of go displayed by her guests, had begun talking with the greatest distinctness.

"You know the Prince of Scots has already had a stage box reserved so as to see the *Blonde Venus* when he comes to visit the exhibition."

"I very much hope that all the princes will come and see it," declared Bordenave with his mouth full.

"They are expecting the shah of Persia next Sunday," said Lucy Stewart.

Whereupon Rose Mignon spoke of the shah's diamonds. He wore a tunic entirely covered with gems; it was a marvel, a flaming star; it represented millions. And the ladies, with pale faces and eyes glittering with covetousness, craned forward and ran over the names of the other kings, the other emperors, who were shortly expected. All of them were dreaming of some royal caprice, some night to be paid for by a fortune.

"Now tell me, dear boy," Caroline Héquet asked Vandevres, leaning forward as she did so, "how old's the emperor of Russia?"

"Oh, he's 'present time,'" replied the count, laughing. "Nothing to be done in that quarter, I warn you."

Nana made pretense of being hurt. The witticism appeared somewhat too stinging, and there was a murmur of protest. But Blanche gave a description of the king of Italy, whom she had once seen at Milan. He was scarcely good looking, and yet that did not prevent him enjoying all the women. She was put out somewhat when Fauchery assured her that Victor Emmanuel could not come to the exhibition. Louise Violaine and Léa favored the emperor of Austria, and all of a sudden little Maria Blond was heard saying:

"What an old stick the king of Prussia is! I was at Baden last year, and one was always meeting him about with Count Bismarck."

"Dear me, Bismarck!" Simonne interrupted. "I knew him once, I did. A charming man."

"That's what I was saying yesterday," cried Vandevres, "but nobody would believe me."

And just as at Countess Sabine's, there ensued a long discussion about Bismarck. Vandevres repeated the same phrases, and for a moment or two one was again in the Muffats' drawing room, the only difference being that the ladies were changed. Then, just as last night, they passed on to a discussion on music, after which, Foucarmont having let slip some mention of the assumption of the veil of which Paris was still talking, Nana grew quite interested and insisted on details about Mlle de Fougerey. Oh, the poor child, fancy her burying herself alive like that! Ah well, when it was a question of vocation!

All round the table the women expressed themselves much touched, and Georges, wearied at hearing these things a second time discussed, was beginning to ask Daguenet about Nana's ways in private life, when the conversation veered fatefully back to Count Bismarck. Tatan Néné bent toward Labordette to ask him privily who this Bismarck might be, for she did not know him. Whereupon Labordette, in cold blood, told her some portentous anecdotes. This Bismarck, he said, was in the habit of eating raw meat and when he met a woman near his den would carry her off thither on his back; at forty years of age he had already had as many as thirty-two children that way.

"Thirty-two children at forty!" cried Tatan Néné, stupefied and yet convinced. "He must be jolly well worn out for his age."

There was a burst of merriment, and it dawned on her that she was being made game of.

"You sillies! How am I to know if you're joking?"

Gaga, meanwhile, had stopped at the exhibition. Like all these ladies, she was delightedly preparing for the fray. A good season, provincials and foreigners rushing into Paris! In the long run, perhaps, after the close of the exhibition she would, if her business had flourished, be able to retire to a little house at Jouvisy, which she had long had her eye on.

"What's to be done?" she said to La Faloise. "One never gets what one wants! Oh, if only one were still really loved!"

Gaga behaved meltingly because she had felt the young man's knee gently placed against her own. He was blushing hotly and lisping as elegantly as ever. She weighed him at a glance. Not a very heavy little gentleman, to be sure, but then she wasn't hard to please. La Faloise obtained her address.

"Just look there," murmured Vandevures to Clarisse. "I think Gaga's doing you out of your Hector."

"A good riddance, so far as I'm concerned," replied the actress. "That fellow's an idiot. I've already chucked him downstairs three times. You know, I'm disgusted when dirty little boys run after old women."

She broke off and with a little gesture indicated Blanche, who from the commencement of dinner had remained in a most uncomfortable attitude, sitting up very markedly, with the intention of displaying her shoulders to the old distinguished-looking gentleman three seats beyond her.

"You're being left too," she resumed.

Vandevures smiled his thin smile and made a little movement to signify he did not care. Assuredly 'twas not he who would ever have prevented poor, dear Blanche scoring a success. He was more interested by the spectacle which Steiner was presenting to the table at large. The banker was noted for his sudden flames. That terrible German Jew who brewed money, whose hands forged millions, was wont to turn imbecile whenever he became enamored of a woman. He wanted them all too! Not one could make her appearance on the stage but he bought her, however expensive she might be. Vast sums were quoted. Twice had his furious appetite for courtesans ruined him. The courtesans, as Vandevures used to say, avenged public morality by emptying his moneybags. A big operation in the saltworks of the Landes had rendered

him powerful on 'change, and so for six weeks past the Mignons had been getting a pretty slice out of those same saltworks. But people were beginning to lay wagers that the Mignons would not finish their slice, for Nana was showing her white teeth. Once again Steiner was in the toils, and so deeply this time that as he sat by Nana's side he seemed stunned; he ate without appetite; his lip hung down; his face was mottled. She had only to name a figure. Nevertheless, she did not hurry but continued playing with him, breathing her merry laughter into his hairy ear and enjoying the little convulsive movements which kept traversing his heavy face. There would always be time enough to patch all that up if that ninny of a Count Muffat were really to treat her as Joseph did Potiphar's wife.

"Léoville or Chambertin?" murmured a waiter, who came craning forward between Nana and Steiner just as the latter was addressing her in a low voice.

"Eh, what?" he stammered, losing his head. "Whatever you like—I don't care."

Vandeuvres gently nudged Lucy Stewart, who had a very spiteful tongue and a very fierce invention when once she was set going. That evening Mignon was driving her to exasperation.

"He would gladly be bottleholder, you know," she remarked to the count. "He's in hopes of repeating what he did with little Jonquier. You remember: Jonquier was Rose's man, but he was sweet on big Laure. Now Mignon procured Laure for Jonquier and then came back arm in arm with him to Rose, as if he were a husband who had been allowed a little peccadillo. But this time the thing's going to fail. Nana doesn't give up the men who are lent her."

"What ails Mignon that he should be looking at his wife in that severe way?" asked Vandeuvres.

He leaned forward and saw Rose growing exceedingly amorous toward Fauchery. This was the explanation of his neighbor's wrath. He resumed laughingly:

"The devil, are you jealous?"

"Jealous!" said Lucy in a fury. "Good gracious, if Rose is wanting Léon I give him up willingly—for what he's worth! That's to say, for a bouquet a week and the rest to match! Look here, my dear boy, these theatrical trollops are all made the same way. Why, Rose cried with rage when she read Léon's article on Nana; I know she did. So now, you understand, she must have an article, too, and she's gaining it. As for me, I'm going to chuck Léon downstairs—you'll see!"

She paused to say "Léoville" to the waiter standing behind her with his two bottles and then resumed in lowered tones:

"I don't want to shout; it isn't my style. But she's a cocky slut all the same. If I were in her husband's place I should lead her a lovely dance. Oh, she won't be very happy over it. She doesn't know my Fauchery: a dirty gent he is, too, palling up with women like that so as to get on in the world. Oh, a nice lot they are!"

Vandeuvres did his best to calm her down, but Bordenave, deserted by Rose and by Lucy, grew angry and cried out that they were letting Papa perish of

hunger and thirst. This produced a fortunate diversion. Yet the supper was flagging; no one was eating now, though platefuls of *cèpes à l'italienne* and pineapple fritters *à la Pompadour* were being mangled. The champagne, however, which had been drunk ever since the soup course, was beginning little by little to warm the guests into a state of nervous exaltation. They ended by paying less attention to decorum than before. The women began leaning on their elbows amid the disordered table arrangements, while the men, in order to breathe more easily, pushed their chairs back, and soon the black coats appeared buried between the light-colored bodices, and bare shoulders, half turned toward the table, began to gleam as soft as silk. It was too hot, and the glare of the candles above the table grew ever yellower and duller. Now and again, when a woman bent forward, the back of her neck glowed golden under a rain of curls, and the glitter of a diamond clasp lit up a lofty chignon. There was a touch of fire in the passing jests, in the laughing eyes, in the sudden gleam of white teeth, in the reflection of the candelabra on the surface of a glass of champagne. The company joked at the tops of their voices, gesticulated, asked questions which no one answered and called to one another across the whole length of the room. But the loudest din was made by the waiters; they fancied themselves at home in the corridors of their parent restaurant; they jostled one another and served the ices and the dessert to an accompaniment of guttural exclamations.

"My children," shouted Bordenave, "you know we're playing tomorrow. Be careful! Not too much champagne!"

"As far as I'm concerned," said Foucarmont, "I've drunk every imaginable kind of wine in all the four quarters of the globe. Extraordinary liquors some of 'em, containing alcohol enough to kill a corpse! Well, and what d'you think? Why, it never hurt me a bit. I can't make myself drunk. I've tried and I can't."

He was very pale, very calm and collected, and he lolled back in his chair, drinking without cessation.

"Never mind that," murmured Louise Violaine. "Leave off; you've had enough. It would be a funny business if I had to look after you the rest of the night."

Such was her state of exaltation that Lucy Stewart's cheeks were assuming a red, consumptive flush, while Rose Mignon with moist eyelids was growing excessively melting. Tatan Néné, greatly astonished at the thought that she had overeaten herself, was laughing vaguely over her own stupidity. The others, such as Blanche, Caroline, Simonne and Maria, were all talking at once and telling each other about their private affairs—about a dispute with a coachman, a projected picnic and innumerable complex stories of lovers stolen or restored. Meanwhile a young man near Georges, having evinced a desire to kiss Léa de Horn, received a sharp rap, accompanied by a "Look here, you, let me go!" which was spoken in a tone of fine indignation; and Georges, who was now very tipsy and greatly excited by the sight of Nana, hesitated about carrying out a project which he had been gravely maturing. He had been planning, indeed, to get under the table on all fours and to go and crouch at Nana's feet like a little dog. Nobody would have seen him, and he would

have stayed there in the quietest way. But when at Léa's urgent request Daguenet had told the young man to sit still, Georges all at once felt grievously chagrined, as though the reproof had just been leveled at him. Oh, it was all silly and slow, and there was nothing worth living for! Daguenet, nevertheless, began chaffing and obliged him to swallow a big glassful of water, asking him at the same time what he would do if he were to find himself alone with a woman, seeing that three glasses of champagne were able to bowl him over.

"Why, in Havana," resumed Foucarmont, "they make a spirit with a certain wild berry; you think you're swallowing fire! Well now, one evening I drank more than a liter of it, and it didn't hurt me one bit. Better than that, another time when we were on the coast of Coromandel some savages gave us I don't know what sort of a mixture of pepper and vitriol, and that didn't hurt me one bit. I can't make myself drunk."

For some moments past La Faloise's face opposite had excited his displeasure. He began sneering and giving vent to disagreeable witticisms. La Faloise, whose brain was in a whirl, was behaving very restlessly and squeezing up against Gaga. But at length he became the victim of anxiety; somebody had just taken his handkerchief, and with drunken obstinacy he demanded it back again, asked his neighbors about it, stooped down in order to look under the chairs and the guests' feet. And when Gaga did her best to quiet him:

"It's a nuisance," he murmured, "my initials and my coronet are worked in the corner. They may compromise me."

"I say, Monsieur Falamoise, Lamafoise, Mafaloise!" shouted Foucarmont, who thought it exceedingly witty thus to disfigure the young man's name *ad infinitum*.

But La Faloise grew wroth and talked with a stutter about his ancestry. He threatened to send a water bottle at Foucarmont's head, and Count de Vandevres had to interfere in order to assure him that Foucarmont was a great joker. Indeed, everybody was laughing. This did for the already flurried young man, who was very glad to resume his seat and to begin eating with childlike submissiveness when in a loud voice his cousin ordered him to feed. Gaga had taken him back to her ample side; only from time to time he cast sly and anxious glances at the guests, for he ceased not to search for his handkerchief.

Then Foucarmont, being now in his witty vein, attacked Labordette right at the other end of the table. Louise Violaine strove to make him hold his tongue, for, she said, "when he goes nagging at other people like that it always ends in mischief for me." He had discovered a witticism which consisted in addressing Labordette as "Madame," and it must have amused him greatly, for he kept on repeating it while Labordette tranquilly shrugged his shoulders and as constantly replied:

"Pray hold your tongue, my dear fellow; it's stupid."

But as Foucarmont failed to desist and even became insulting without his neighbors knowing why, he left off answering him and appealed to Count Vandevres.

"Make your friend hold his tongue, monsieur. I don't wish to become angry."

Foucarmont had twice fought duels, and he was in consequence most politely

treated and admitted into every circle. But there was now a general uprising against him. The table grew merry at his sallies, for they thought him very witty, but that was no reason why the evening should be spoiled. Vandeuvres, whose subtle countenance was darkening visibly, insisted on his restoring Labordette his sex. The other men—Mignon, Steiner and Bordenave—who were by this time much exalted, also intervened with shouts which drowned his voice. Only the old gentleman sitting forgotten next to Nana retained his stately demeanor and, still smiling in his tired, silent way, watched with lack-luster eyes the untoward finish of the dessert.

"What do you say to our taking coffee in here, duckie?" said Bordenave. "We're very comfortable."

Nana did not give an immediate reply. Since the beginning of supper she had seemed no longer in her own house. All this company had overwhelmed and bewildered her with their shouts to the waiters, the loudness of their voices and the way in which they put themselves at their ease, just as though they were in a restaurant. Forgetting her role of hostess, she busied herself exclusively with bulky Steiner, who was verging on apoplexy beside her. She was listening to his proposals and continually refusing them with shakes of the head and that temptress's laughter which is peculiar to a voluptuous blonde. The champagne she had been drinking had flushed her a rosy-red; her lips were moist; her eyes sparkled, and the banker's offers rose with every kittenish movement of her shoulders, with every little voluptuous lift and fall of her throat, which occurred when she turned her head. Close by her ear he kept espying a sweet little satiny corner which drove him crazy. Occasionally Nana was interrupted, and then, remembering her guests, she would try and be as pleased as possible in order to show that she knew how to receive. Toward the end of the supper she was very tipsy. It made her miserable to think of it, but champagne had a way of intoxicating her almost directly! Then an exasperating notion struck her. In behaving thus improperly at her table, these ladies were showing themselves anxious to do her an ugly turn. Oh yes, she could see it all distinctly. Lucy had given Foucarmont a wink in order to egg him on against Labordette, while Rose, Caroline and the others were doing all they could to stir up the men. Now there was such a din you couldn't hear your neighbor speak, and so the story would get about that you might allow yourself every kind of liberty when you supped at Nana's. Very well then! They should see! She might be tipsy, if you like, but she was still the smartest and most ladylike woman there.

"Do tell them to serve the coffee here, duckie," resumed Bordenave. "I prefer it here because of my leg."

But Nana had sprung savagely to her feet after whispering into the astonished ears of Steiner and the old gentleman:

"It's quite right; it'll teach me to go and invite a dirty lot like that."

Then she pointed to the door of the dining room and added at the top of her voice:

"If you want coffee it's there, you know."

The company left the table and crowded toward the dining room without

noticing Nana's indignant outburst. And soon no one was left in the drawing room save Bordenave, who advanced cautiously, supporting himself against the wall and cursing away at the confounded women who chucked Papa the moment they were chock-full. The waiters behind him were already busy removing the plates and dishes in obedience to the loudly voiced orders of the manager. They rushed to and fro, jostled one another, caused the whole table to vanish, as a pantomime property might at the sound of the chief scene-shifter's whistle. The ladies and gentlemen were to return to the drawing room after drinking their coffee.

"By gum, it's less hot here," said Gaga with a slight shiver as she entered the dining room.

The window here had remained open. Two lamps illuminated the table, where coffee and liqueurs were set out. There were no chairs, and the guests drank their coffee standing, while the hubbub the waiters were making in the next room grew louder and louder. Nana had disappeared, but nobody fretted about her absence. They did without her excellently well, and everybody helped himself and rummaged in the drawers of the sideboard in search of teaspoons, which were lacking. Several groups were formed; people separated during supper rejoined each other, and there was an interchange of glances, of meaning laughter and of phrases which summed up recent situations.

"Ought not Monsieur Fauchery to come and lunch with us one of these days, Auguste?" said Rose Mignon.

Mignon, who was toying with his watch chain, eyed the journalist for a second or two with his severe glance. Rose was out of her senses. As became a good manager, he would put a stop to such spendthrift courses. In return for a notice, well and good, but afterward, decidedly not. Nevertheless, as he was fully aware of his wife's wrongheadedness and as he made it a rule to wink paternally at a folly now and again, when such was necessary, he answered amiably enough:

"Certainly, I shall be most happy. Pray come tomorrow, Monsieur Fauchery."

Lucy Stewart heard this invitation given while she was talking with Steiner and Blanche and, raising her voice, she remarked to the banker:

"It's a mania they've all of them got. One of them even went so far as to steal my dog. Now, dear boy, am I to blame if you chuck her?"

Rose turned round. She was very pale and gazed fixedly at Steiner as she sipped her coffee. And then all the concentrated anger she felt at his abandonment of her flamed out in her eyes. She saw more clearly than Mignon; it was stupid in him to have wished to begin the Jonquier ruse a second time—those dodgers never succeeded twice running. Well, so much the worse for him! She would have Fauchery! She had been getting enamored of him since the beginning of supper, and if Mignon was not pleased it would teach him greater wisdom!

"You are not going to fight?" said Vandeuvres, coming over to Lucy Stewart.

"No, don't be afraid of that! Only she must mind and keep quiet, or I let the cat out of the bag!"

Then signing imperiously to Fauchery:

"I've got your slippers at home, my little man. I'll get them taken to your porter's lodge for you tomorrow."

He wanted to joke about it, but she swept off, looking like a queen. Clarisse, who had propped herself against a wall in order to drink a quiet glass of kirsch, was seen to shrug her shoulders. A pleasant business for a man! Wasn't it true that the moment two women were together in the presence of their lovers their first idea was to do one another out of them? It was a law of nature! As to herself, why, in heaven's name, if she had wanted to she would have torn out Gaga's eyes on Hector's account! But la, she despised him! Then as La Faloise passed by, she contented herself by remarking to him:

"Listen, my friend, you like 'em well advanced, you do! You don't want 'em ripe; you want 'em mildewed!"

La Faloise seemed much annoyed and not a little anxious. Seeing Clarisse making game of him, he grew suspicious of her.

"No humbug, I say," he muttered. "You've taken my handkerchief. Well then, give it back!"

"He's dreeing us with that handkerchief of his!" she cried. "Why, you ass, why should I have taken it from you?"

"Why should you?" he said suspiciously. "Why, that you may send it to my people and compromise me."

In the meantime Foucarmont was diligently attacking the liqueurs. He continued to gaze sneeringly at Labordette, who was drinking his coffee in the midst of the ladies. And occasionally he gave vent to fragmentary assertions, as thus: "He's the son of a horse dealer; some say the illegitimate child of a countess. Never a penny of income, yet always got twenty-five louis in his pocket! Footboy to the ladies of the town! A big lubber, who never goes with any of 'em! Never, never, never!" he repeated, growing furious. "No, by Jove! I must box his ears."

He drained a glass of chartreuse. The chartreuse had not the slightest effect upon him; it didn't affect him "even to that extent," and he clicked his thumb-nail against the edge of his teeth. But suddenly, just as he was advancing upon Labordette, he grew ashy white and fell down in a heap in front of the side-board. He was dead drunk. Louise Violaine was beside herself. She had been quite right to prophesy that matters would end badly, and now she would have her work cut out for the remainder of the night. Gaga reassured her. She examined the officer with the eye of a woman of experience and declared that there was nothing much the matter and that the gentleman would sleep like that for at least a dozen or fifteen hours without any serious consequences. Foucarmont was carried off.

"Well, where's Nana gone to?" asked Vandeuves.

Yes, she had certainly flown away somewhere on leaving the table. The company suddenly recollected her, and everybody asked for her. Steiner, who for some seconds had been uneasy on her account, asked Vandeuves about the old

gentleman, for he, too, had disappeared. But the count reassured him—he had just brought the old gentleman back. He was a stranger, whose name it was useless to mention. Suffice it to say that he was a very rich man who was quite pleased to pay for suppers! Then as Nana was once more being forgotten, Vandeuvres saw Daguenet looking out of an open door and beckoning to him. And in the bedroom he found the mistress of the house sitting up, white-lipped and rigid, while Daguenet and Georges stood gazing at her with an alarmed expression.

“What *is* the matter with you?” he asked in some surprise.

She neither answered nor turned her head, and he repeated his question.

“Why, this is what’s the matter with me,” she cried out at length; “I won’t let them make bloody sport of me!”

Thereupon she gave vent to any expression that occurred to her. Yes, oh yes, *she* wasn’t a ninny—*she* could see clearly enough. They had been making devilish light of her during supper and saying all sorts of frightful things to show that they thought nothing of her! A pack of sluts who weren’t fit to black her boots! Catch her bothering herself again just to be badgered for it after! She really didn’t know what kept her from chuckling all that dirty lot out of the house! And with this, rage choked her and her voice broke down in sobs.

“Come, come, my lass, you’re drunk,” said Vandeuvres, growing familiar. “You must be reasonable.”

No, she would give her refusal now; she would stay where she was.

“I am drunk—it’s quite likely! But I want people to respect me!”

For a quarter of an hour past Daguenet and Georges had been vainly beseeching her to return to the drawing room. She was obstinate, however; her guests might do what they liked; she despised them too much to come back among them.

No, she never would, never. They might tear her in pieces before she would leave her room!

“I ought to have had my suspicions,” she resumed.

“It’s that cat of a Rose who’s got the plot up! I’m certain Rose’ll have stopped that respectable woman coming whom I was expecting tonight.”

She referred to Mme Robert. Vandeuvres gave her his word of honor that Mme Robert had given a spontaneous refusal. He listened and he argued with much gravity, for he was well accustomed to similar scenes and knew how women in such a state ought to be treated. But the moment he tried to take hold of her hands in order to lift her up from her chair and draw her away with him she struggled free of his clasp, and her wrath redoubled. Now, just look at that! They would never get her to believe that Fauchery had not put the Count Muffat off coming! A regular snake was that Fauchery, an envious sort, a fellow capable of growing mad against a woman and of destroying her whole happiness. For she knew this—the count had become madly devoted to her! She could have had him!

“Him, my dear, never!” cried Vandeuvres, forgetting himself and laughing aloud.

“Why not?” she asked, looking serious and slightly sobered.

"Because he's thoroughly in the hands of the priests, and if he were only to touch you with the tips of his fingers he would go and confess it the day after. Now listen to a bit of good advice. Don't let the other man escape you!"

She was silent and thoughtful for a moment or two. Then she got up and went and bathed her eyes. Yet when they wanted to take her into the dining room she still shouted "No!" furiously. Vandevres left the bedroom, smiling and without further pressing her, and the moment he was gone she had an access of melting tenderness, threw herself into Daguenet's arms and cried out:

"Ah, my sweetie, there's only you in the world. I love you! *Yes, I love you from the bottom of my heart!* Oh, it would be too nice if we could always live together. My God! How unfortunate women are!"

Then her eye fell upon Georges, who, seeing them kiss, was growing very red, and she kissed him too. Sweetie could not be jealous of a baby! She wanted Paul and Georges always to agree, because it would be so nice for them all three to stay like that, knowing all the time that they loved one another very much. But an extraordinary noise disturbed them: someone was snoring in the room. Whereupon after some searching they perceived Bordenave, who, since taking his coffee, must have comfortably installed himself there. He was sleeping on two chairs, his head propped on the edge of the bed and his leg stretched out in front. Nana thought him so funny with his open mouth and his nose moving with each successive snore that she was shaken with a mad fit of laughter. She left the room, followed by Daguenet and Georges, crossed the dining room, entered the drawing room, her merriment increasing at every step.

"Oh, my dear, you've no idea!" she cried, almost throwing herself into Rose's arms. "Come and see it."

All the women had to follow her. She took their hands coaxingly and drew them along with her willy-nilly, accompanying her action with so frank an outburst of mirth that they all of them began laughing on trust. The band vanished and returned after standing breathlessly for a second or two round Bordenave's lordly, outstretched form. And then there was a burst of laughter, and when one of them told the rest to be quiet Bordenave's distant snorings became audible.

It was close on four o'clock. In the dining room a card table had just been set out, at which Vandevres, Steiner, Mignon and Labordette had taken their seats. Behind them Lucy and Caroline stood making bets, while Blanche, nodding with sleep and dissatisfied about her night, kept asking Vandevres at intervals of five minutes if they weren't going soon. In the drawing room there was an attempt at dancing. Daguenet was at the piano or "chest of drawers," as Nana called it. She did not want a "thumper," for Mimi would play as many waltzes and polkas as the company desired. But the dance was languishing, and the ladies were chatting drowsily together in the corners of sofas. Suddenly, however, there was an outburst of noise. A band of eleven young men had arrived and were laughing loudly in the anteroom and crowding to the drawing room. They had just come from the ball at the Ministry of the Interior and were in evening dress and wore various unknown orders. Nana was annoyed at

this riotous entry, called to the waiters who still remained in the kitchen and ordered them to throw these individuals out of doors. She vowed that she had never seen any of them before. Fauchery, Labordette, Daguenet and the rest of the men had all come forward in order to enforce respectful behavior toward their hostess. Big words flew about; arms were outstretched, and for some seconds a general exchange of fisticuffs was imminent. Notwithstanding this, however, a little sickly looking light-haired man kept insistently repeating:

"Come, come, Nana, you saw us the other evening at Peters' in the great red saloon! Pray remember, you invited us."

The other evening at Peters'? She did not remember it all. To begin with, what evening?

And when the little light-haired man had mentioned the day, which was Wednesday, she distinctly remembered having supped at Peters' on the Wednesday, but she had given no invitation to anyone; she was almost sure of that.

"However, suppose you *have* invited them, my good girl," murmured Labordette, who was beginning to have his doubts. "Perhaps you were a little elevated."

Then Nana fell a-laughing. It was quite possible; she really didn't know. So then, since these gentlemen were on the spot, they had her leave to come in. Everything was quietly arranged; several of the newcomers found friends in the drawing room, and the scene ended in handshakings. The little sickly looking light-haired man bore one of the greatest names in France. Furthermore, the eleven announced that others were to follow them, and, in fact, the door opened every few moments, and men in white gloves and official garb presented themselves. They were still coming from the ball at the Ministry. Fauchery jestingly inquired whether the minister was not coming, too, but Nana answered in a huff that the minister went to the houses of people she didn't care a pin for. What she did not say was that she was possessed with a hope of seeing Count Muffat enter her room among all that stream of people. He might quite have reconsidered his decision, and so while talking to Rose she kept a sharp eye on the door.

Five o'clock struck. The dancing had ceased, and the cardplayers alone persisted in their game. Labordette had vacated his seat, and the women had returned into the drawing room. The air there was heavy with the somnolence which accompanies a long vigil, and the lamps cast a wavering light while their burned-out wicks glowed red within their globes. The ladies had reached that vaguely melancholy hour when they felt it necessary to tell each other their histories. Blanche de Sivry spoke of her grandfather, the general, while Clarisse invented a romantic story about a duke seducing her at her uncle's house, whither he used to come for the boar hunting. Both women, looking different ways, kept shrugging their shoulders and asking themselves how the deuce the other could tell such whoppers! As to Lucy Stewart, she quietly confessed to her origin and of her own accord spoke of her childhood and of the days when her father, the wheel greaser at the Northern Railway Terminus, used to treat her to an apple puff on Sundays.

"Oh, I must tell you about it!" cried the little Maria Blond abruptly. "Op-

posite to me there lives a gentleman, a Russian, an awfully rich man! Well, just fancy, yesterday I received a basket of fruit—oh, it just was a basket! Enormous peaches, grapes as big as that, simply wonderful for the time of year! And in the middle of them six thousand-franc notes! It was the Russian's doing. Of course I sent the whole thing back again, but I must say my heart ached a little—when I thought of the fruit!"

The ladies looked at one another and pursed up their lips. At her age little Maria Blond had a pretty cheek! Besides, to think that such things should happen to trollops like her! Infinite was their contempt for her among themselves. It was Lucy of whom they were particularly jealous, for they were beside themselves at the thought of her three princes. Since Lucy had begun taking a daily morning ride in the Bois they all had become Amazons, as though a mania possessed them.

Day was about to dawn, and Nana turned her eyes away from the door, for she was relinquishing all hope. The company were bored to distraction. Rose Mignon had refused to sing the "Slipper" and sat huddled up on a sofa, chatting in a low voice with Fauchery and waiting for Mignon, who had by now won some fifty louis from Vandeuvres. A fat gentleman with a decoration and a serious cast of countenance had certainly given a recitation in Alsatian accents of "Abraham's Sacrifice," a piece in which the Almighty says, "By My blasted Name" when He swears, and Isaac always answers with a "Yes, Papa!" Nobody, however, understood what it was all about, and the piece had been voted stupid. People were at their wits' end how to make merry and to finish the night with fitting hilarity. For a moment or two Labordette conceived the idea of denouncing different women in a whisper to La Faloise, who still went prowling round each individual lady, looking to see if she were hiding his handkerchief in her bosom. Soon, as there were still some bottles of champagne on the sideboard, the young men again fell to drinking. They shouted to one another; they stirred each other up, but a dreary species of intoxication, which was stupid enough to drive one to despair, began to overcome the company beyond hope of recovery. Then the little fair-haired fellow, the man who bore one of the greatest names in France and had reached his wit's end and was desperate at the thought that he could not hit upon something really funny, conceived a brilliant notion: he snatched up his bottle of champagne and poured its contents into the piano. His allies were convulsed with laughter.

"La now! Why's he putting champagne into the piano?" asked Tatan Néné in great astonishment as she caught sight of him.

"What, my lass, you don't know why he's doing that?" replied Labordette solemnly. "There's nothing so good as champagne for pianos. It gives 'em tone."

"Ah," murmured Tatan Néné with conviction.

And when the rest began laughing at her she grew angry. How should she know? They were always confusing her.

Decidedly the evening was becoming a big failure. The night threatened to end in the unloveliest way. In a corner by themselves Maria Blond and Léa de Horn had begun squabbling at close quarters, the former accusing the latter

of consorting with people of insufficient wealth. They were getting vastly abusive over it, their chief stumbling block being the good looks of the men in question. Lucy, who was plain, got them to hold their tongues. Good looks were nothing, according to her; good figures were what was wanted. Farther off, on a sofa, an attaché had slipped his arm round Simonne's waist and was trying to kiss her neck, but Simonne, sullen and thoroughly out of sorts, pushed him away at every fresh attempt with cries of "You're pestering me!" and sound slaps of the fan across his face. For the matter of that, not one of the ladies allowed herself to be touched. Did people take them for light women? Gaga, in the meantime, had once more caught La Faloise and had almost hoisted him upon her knees while Clarisse was disappearing from view between two gentlemen, shaking with nervous laughter as women will when they are tickled. Round about the piano they were still busy with their little game, for they were suffering from a fit of stupid imbecility, which caused each man to jostle his fellow in his frantic desire to empty his bottle into the instrument. It was a simple process and a charming one.

"Now then, old boy, drink a glass! Devil take it, he's a thirsty piano! Hi! Tenshun! Here's another bottle! You mustn't lose a drop!"

Nana's back was turned, and she did not see them. Emphatically she was now falling back on the bulky Steiner, who was seated next to her. So much the worse! It was all on account of that Muffat, who had refused what was offered him. Sitting there in her white foulard dress, which was as light and full of folds as a shift, sitting there with drooped eyelids and cheeks pale with the touch of intoxication from which she was suffering, she offered herself to him with that quiet expression which is peculiar to a good-natured courtesan. The roses in her hair and at her throat had lost their leaves, and their stalks alone remained. Presently Steiner withdrew his hand quickly from the folds of her skirt, where he had come in contact with the pins that Georges had stuck there. Some drops of blood appeared on his fingers, and one fell on Nana's dress and stained it.

"Now the bargain's struck," said Nana gravely.

The day was breaking apace. An uncertain glimmer of light, fraught with a poignant melancholy, came stealing through the windows. And with that the guests began to take their departure. It was a most sour and uncomfortable retreat. Caroline Héquet, annoyed at the loss of her night, announced that it was high time to be off unless you were anxious to assist at some pretty scenes. Rose pouted as if her womanly character had been compromised. It was always so with these girls; they didn't know how to behave and were guilty of disgusting conduct when they made their first appearance in society! And Mignon having cleaned Vandeuves out completely, the family took their departure. They did not trouble about Steiner but renewed their invitation for tomorrow to Fauchery. Lucy thereupon refused the journalist's escort home and sent him back shrilly to his "strolling actress." At this Rose turned round immediately and hissed out a "Dirty sow" by way of answer. But Mignon, who in feminine quarrels was always paternal, for his experience was a long one and rendered him superior to them, had already pushed her out of the house, telling her at

the same time to have done. Lucy came downstairs in solitary state behind them. After which Gaga had to carry off La Faloise, ill, sobbing like a child, calling after Clarisse, who had long since gone off with her two gentlemen. Simonne, too, had vanished. Indeed, none remained save Tatan, Léa and Maria, whom Labordette complaisantly took under his charge.

"Oh, but I don't the least bit want to go to bed!" said Nana. "One ought to find something to do."

She looked at the sky through the windowpanes. It was a livid sky, and sooty clouds were scudding across it. It was six o'clock in the morning. Over the way, on the opposite side of the Boulevard Haussmann, the glistening roofs of the still-slumbering houses were sharply outlined against the twilight sky while along the deserted roadway a gang of street sweepers passed with a clatter of wooden shoes. As she viewed Paris thus grimly awakening, she was overcome by tender, girlish feelings, by a yearning for the country, for idyllic scenes, for things soft and white.

"Now guess what you're to do," she said, coming back to Steiner. "You're going to take me to the Bois de Boulogne, and we'll drink milk there."

She clapped her hands in childish glee. Without waiting for the banker's reply—he naturally consented, though he was really rather bored and inclined to think of other things—she ran off to throw a pelisse over her shoulders. In the drawing room there was now no one with Steiner save the band of young men. These had by this time dropped the very dregs of their glasses into the piano and were talking of going, when one of their number ran in triumphantly. He held in his hands a last remaining bottle, which he had brought back with him from the pantry.

"Wait a minute, wait a minute!" he shouted. "Here's a bottle of chartreuse; that'll pick him up! And now, my young friends, let's hook it. We're blooming idiots."

In the dressing room Nana was compelled to wake up Zoé, who had dozed off on a chair. The gas was still alight, and Zoé shivered as she helped her mistress on with her hat and pelisse.

"Well, it's over; I've done what you wanted me to," said Nana, speaking familiarly to the maid in a sudden burst of expansive confidence and much relieved at the thought that she had at last made her election. "You were quite right; the banker's as good as another."

The maid was cross, for she was still heavy with sleep. She grumbled something to the effect that Madame ought to have come to a decision the first evening. Then following her into the bedroom, she asked what she was going to do with "those two," meaning Bordenave, who was snoring away as usual, and Georges, who had slipped in slyly, buried his head in a pillow and, finally falling asleep there, was now breathing as lightly and regularly as a cherub. Nana in reply told her that she was to let them sleep on. But seeing Daguenet come into the room, she again grew tender. He had been watching her from the kitchen and was looking very wretched.

"Come, my sweetie, be reasonable," she said, taking him in her arms and kissing him with all sorts of little wheedling caresses. "Nothing's changed; you

know that it's sweetie whom I always adore! Eh, dear? I had to do it. Why, I swear to you we shall have even nicer times now. Come tomorrow, and we'll arrange about hours. Now be quick, kiss and hug me as you love me. Oh, tighter, tighter than that!"

And she escaped and rejoined Steiner, feeling happy and once more possessed with the idea of drinking milk. In the empty room the Count de Vandeuves was left alone with the "decorated" man who had recited "Abraham's Sacrifice." Both seemed glued to the card table; they had lost count of their whereabouts and never once noticed the broad light of day without, while Blanche had made bold to put her feet up on a sofa in order to try and get a little sleep.

"Oh, Blanche is with them!" cried Nana. "We are going to drink milk, dear. Do come; you'll find Vandeuves here when we return."

Blanche got up lazily. This time the banker's fiery face grew white with annoyance at the idea of having to take that big wench with him too. She was certain to bore him. But the two women had already got him by the arms and were reiterating:

"We want them to milk the cow before our eyes, you know."

CHAPTER V

AT THE VARIÉTÉS they were giving the thirty-fourth performance of the *Blonde Venus*. The first act had just finished, and in the greenroom Simonne, dressed as the little laundress, was standing in front of a console table, surmounted by a looking glass and situated between the two corner doors which opened obliquely on the end of the dressing-room passage. No one was with her, and she was scrutinizing her face and rubbing her finger up and down below her eyes with a view to putting the finishing touches to her make-up. The gas jets on either side of the mirror flooded her with warm, crude light.

"Has he arrived?" asked Prullière, entering the room in his Alpine admiral's costume, which was set off by a big sword, enormous top boots and a vast tuft of plumes.

"Who d'you mean?" said Simonne, taking no notice of him and laughing into the mirror in order to see how her lips looked.

"The prince."

"I don't know; I've just come down. Oh, he's certainly due here tonight; he comes every time!"

Prullière had drawn near the hearth opposite the console table, where a coke fire was blazing and two more gas jets were flaring brightly. He lifted his eyes and looked at the clock and the barometer on his right hand and on his left. They had gilded sphinxes by way of adornment in the style of the First Empire. Then he stretched himself out in a huge armchair with ears, the green velvet of which had been so worn by four generations of comedians that it looked yellow in places, and there he stayed, with moveless limbs and vacant eyes, in that weary and resigned attitude peculiar to actors who are used to long waits before their turn for going on the stage.

Old Bosc, too, had just made his appearance. He came in dragging one foot behind the other and coughing. He was wrapped in an old box coat, part of which had slipped from his shoulder in such a way as to uncover the gold-laced cloak of King Dagobert. He put his crown on the piano and for a moment or two stood moodily stamping his feet. His hands were trembling slightly with the first beginnings of alcoholism, but he looked a sterling old fellow for all that, and a long white beard lent that fiery tippler's face of his a truly venerable appearance. Then in the silence of the room, while the shower of hail was whipping the panes of the great window that looked out on the courtyard, he shook himself disgustedly.

"What filthy weather!" he growled.

Simonne and Prullière did not move. Four or five pictures—a landscape, a portrait of the actor Vernet—hung yellowing in the hot glare of the gas, and a bust of Potier, one of the bygone glories of the Variétés, stood gazing vacant-eyed from its pedestal. But just then there was a burst of voices outside. It was Fontan, dressed for the second act. He was a young dandy, and his habiliments, even to his gloves, were entirely yellow.

"Now say you don't know!" he shouted, gesticulating. "Today's my patron saint's day!"

"What?" asked Simonne, coming up smilingly, as though attracted by the huge nose and the vast, comic mouth of the man. "D'you answer to the name of Achille?"

"Exactly so! And I'm going to get 'em to tell Madame Bron to send up champagne after the second act."

For some seconds a bell had been ringing in the distance. The long-drawn sound grew fainter, then louder, and when the bell ceased a shout ran up the stair and down it till it was lost along the passages. "All on the stage for the second act! All on the stage for the second act!" The sound drew near, and a little pale-faced man passed by the greenroom doors, outside each of which he yelled at the top of his shrill voice, "On the stage for the second act!"

"The deuce, it's champagne!" said Prullière without appearing to hear the din. "You're prospering!"

"If I were you I should have it in from the café," old Bosc slowly announced. He was sitting on a bench covered with green velvet, with his head against the wall.

But Simonne said that it was one's duty to consider Mme Bron's small perquisites. She clapped her hands excitedly and devoured Fontan with her gaze while his long goatlike visage kept up a continuous twitching of eyes and nose and mouth.

"Oh, that Fontan!" she murmured. "There's no one like him, no one like him!"

The two greenroom doors stood wide open to the corridor leading to the wings. And along the yellow wall, which was brightly lit up by a gas lamp out of view, passed a string of rapidly moving shadows—men in costume, women with shawls over their scant attire, in a word, the whole of the characters in the second act, who would shortly make their appearance as masqueraders in

the ball at the Boule Noire. And at the end of the corridor became audible a shuffling of feet as these people clattered down the five wooden steps which led to the stage. As the big Clarisse went running by Simonne called to her, but she said she would be back directly. And, indeed, she reappeared almost at once, shivering in the thin tunic and scarf which she wore as Iris.

"God bless me!" she said. "It isn't warm, and I've left my furs in my dressing room!"

Then as she stood toasting her legs in their warm rose-colored tights in front of the fireplace she resumed:

"The prince has arrived."

"Oh!" cried the rest with the utmost curiosity.

"Yes, that's why I ran down: I wanted to see. He's in the first stage box to the right, the same he was in on Thursday. It's the third time he's been this week, eh? That's Nana; well, she's in luck's way! I was willing to wager he wouldn't come again."

Simonne opened her lips to speak, but her remarks were drowned by a fresh shout which arose close to the greenroom. In the passage the callboy was yelling at the top of his shrill voice, "They've knocked!"

"Three times!" said Simonne when she was again able to speak. "It's getting exciting. You know, he won't go to her place; he takes her to his. And it seems that he has to pay for it too!"

"Egad! It's a case of when one 'has to go out,'" muttered Prullière wickedly, and he got up to have a last look at the mirror as became a handsome fellow whom the boxes adored.

"They've knocked! They've knocked!" the callboy kept repeating in tones that died gradually away in the distance as he passed through the various stories and corridors.

Fontan thereupon, knowing how it had all gone off on the first occasion the prince and Nana met, told the two women the whole story while they in their turn crowded against him and laughed at the tops of their voices whenever he stooped to whisper certain details in their ears. Old Bosc had never budged an inch—he was totally indifferent. That sort of thing no longer interested him now. He was stroking a great tortoise-shell cat which was lying curled up on the bench. He did so quite beautifully and ended by taking her in his arms with the tender good nature becoming a worn-out monarch. The cat arched its back and then, after a prolonged sniff at the big white beard, the gluey odor of which doubtless disgusted her, she turned and, curling herself up, went to sleep again on the bench beside him. Bosc remained grave and absorbed.

"That's all right, but if I were you I should drink the champagne at the restaurant—it's better there," he said, suddenly addressing Fontan when he had finished his recital.

"The curtain's up!" cried the callboy in cracked and long-drawn accents. "The curtain's up! The curtain's up!"

The shout sounded for some moments, during which there had been a noise of rapid footsteps. Through the suddenly opened door of the passage came a burst of music and a far-off murmur of voices, and then the door shut to again,

and you could hear its dull thud as it wedged itself into position once more.

A heavy, peaceful atmosphere again pervaded the greenroom, as though the place were situated a hundred leagues from the house where crowds were applauding. Simonne and Clarisse were still on the topic of Nana. There was a girl who never hurried herself! Why, yesterday she had again come on too late! But there was a silence, for a tall damsel had just craned her head in at the door and, seeing that she had made a mistake, had departed to the other end of the passage. It was Satin. Wearing a hat and a small veil for the nonce she was affecting the manner of a lady about to pay a call.

"A pretty trollop!" muttered Prullière, who had been coming across her for a year past at the *Café des Variétés*. And at this Simonne told them how Nana had recognized in Satin an old schoolmate, had taken a vast fancy to her and was now plaguing Bordenave to let her make a first appearance on the stage.

"How d'y'e do?" said Fontan, shaking hands with Mignon and Fauchery, who now came into the room.

Old Bosc himself gave them the tips of his fingers while the two women kissed Mignon.

"A good house this evening?" queried Fauchery.

"Oh, a splendid one!" replied Prullière. "You should see 'em gaping."

"I say, my little dears," remarked Mignon, "it must be your turn!"

Oh, all in good time! They were only at the fourth scene as yet, but Bosc got up in obedience to instinct, as became a rattling old actor who felt that his cue was coming. At that very moment the callboy was opening the door.

"Monsieur Bosc!" he called. "Mademoiselle Simonne!"

Simonne flung a fur-lined pelisse briskly over her shoulders and went out. Bosc, without hurrying at all, went and got his crown, which he settled on his brow with a rap. Then dragging himself unsteadily along in his greatcoat, he took his departure, grumbling and looking as annoyed as a man who has been rudely disturbed.

"You were very amiable in your last notice," continued Fontan, addressing Fauchery. "Only why do you say that comedians are vain?"

"Yes, my little man, why d'you say that?" shouted Mignon, bringing down his huge hands on the journalist's slender shoulders with such force as almost to double him up.

Prullière and Clarisse refrained from laughing aloud. For some time past the whole company had been deriving amusement from a comedy which was going on in the wings. Mignon, rendered frantic by his wife's caprice and annoyed at the thought that this man Fauchery brought nothing but a certain doubtful notoriety to his household, had conceived the idea of revenging himself on the journalist by overwhelming him with tokens of friendship. Every evening, therefore, when he met him behind scenes he would shower friendly slaps on his back and shoulders, as though fairly carried away by an outburst of tenderness, and Fauchery, who was a frail, small man in comparison with such a giant, was fain to take the raps with a strained smile in order not to quarrel with Rose's husband.

"Aha, my buck, you've insulted Fontan," resumed Mignon, who was doing his best to force the joke. "Stand on guard! One—two—got him right in the middle of his chest!"

He lunged and struck the young man with such force that the latter grew very pale and could not speak for some seconds. With a wink Clarisse showed the others where Rose Mignon was standing on the threshold of the greenroom. Rose had witnessed the scene, and she marched straight up to the journalist, as though she had failed to notice her husband and, standing on tiptoe, bare-armed and in baby costume, she held her face up to him with a caressing, infantine pout.

"Good evening, baby," said Fauchery, kissing her familiarly.

Thus he indemnified himself. Mignon, however, did not seem to have observed this kiss, for everybody kissed his wife at the theater. But he laughed and gave the journalist a keen little look. The latter would assuredly have to pay for Rose's bravado.

In the passage the tightly shutting door opened and closed again, and a tempest of applause was blown as far as the greenroom. Simonne came in after her scene.

"Oh, Father Bosc *has* just scored!" she cried. "The prince was writhing with laughter and applauded with the rest as though he had been paid to. I say, do you know the big man sitting beside the prince in the stage box? A handsome man, with a very sedate expression and splendid whiskers!"

"It's Count Muffat," replied Fauchery. "I know that the prince, when he was at the empress's the day before yesterday, invited him to dinner for tonight. He'll have corrupted him afterward!"

"So that's Count Muffat! We know his father-in-law, eh, Auguste?" said Rose, addressing her remark to Mignon. "You know the Marquis de Chouard, at whose place I went to sing? Well, he's in the house too. I noticed him at the back of a box. There's an old boy for you!"

Pruilière, who had just put on his huge plume of feathers, turned round and called her.

"Hi, Rose! Let's go now!"

She ran after him, leaving her sentence unfinished. At that moment Mme Bron, the portress of the theater, passed by the door with an immense bouquet in her arms. Simonne asked cheerfully if it was for her, but the porter woman did not vouchsafe an answer and only pointed her chin toward Nana's dressing room at the end of the passage. Oh, that Nana! They were loading her with flowers! Then when Mme Bron returned she handed a letter to Clarisse, who allowed a smothered oath to escape her. That beggar La Faloise again! There was a fellow who wouldn't let her alone! And when she learned the gentleman in question was waiting for her at the porter's lodge she shrieked: "Tell him I'm coming down after this act. I'm going to catch him one on the face."

Fontan had rushed forward, shouting:

"Madame Bron, just listen. Please listen, Madame Bron. I want you to send up six bottles of champagne between the acts."

But the callboy had again made his appearance. He was out of breath, and in a singsong voice he called out:

"All to go on the stage! It's your turn, Monsieur Fontan. Make haste, make haste!"

"Yes, yes, I'm going, Father Barillot," replied Fontan in a flurry.

And he ran after Mme Bron and continued:

"You understand, eh? Six bottles of champagne in the greenroom between the acts. It's my patron saint's day, and I'm standing the racket."

Simonne and Clarisse had gone off with a great rustling of skirts. Everybody was swallowed up in the distance, and when the passage door had banged with its usual hollow sound a fresh hail shower was heard beating against the windows in the now-silent greenroom. Barillot, a small, pale-faced ancient, who for thirty years had been a servant in the theater, had advanced familiarly toward Mignon and had presented his open snuffbox to him. This proffer of a pinch and its acceptance allowed him a minute's rest in his interminable career up and down stairs and along the dressing-room passage. He certainly had still to look up Mme Nana, as he called her, but she was one of those who followed her own sweet will and didn't care a pin for penalties. Why, if she chose to be too late she was too late! But he stopped short and murmured in great surprise:

"Well, I never! She's ready; here she is! She must know that the prince is here."

Indeed, Nana appeared in the corridor. She was dressed as a fish hag: her arms and face were plastered with white paint, and she had a couple of red dabs under her eyes. Without entering the greenroom she contented herself by nodding to Mignon and Fauchery.

"How do? You're all right?"

Only Mignon shook her outstretched hand, and she hied royally on her way, followed by her dresser, who almost trod on her heels while stooping to adjust the folds of her skirt. In the rear of the dresser came Satin, closing the procession and trying to look quite the lady, though she was already bored to death.

"And Steiner?" asked Mignon sharply.

"Monsieur Steiner has gone away to the Loiret," said Barillot, preparing to return to the neighborhood of the stage. "I expect he's gone to buy a country place in those parts."

"Ah yes, I know, Nana's country place."

Mignon had grown suddenly serious. Oh, that Steiner! He had promised Rose a fine house in the old days! Well, well, it wouldn't do to grow angry with anybody. Here was a position that would have to be won again. From fireplace to console table Mignon paced, sunk in thought yet still unconquered by circumstances. There was no one in the greenroom now save Fauchery and himself. The journalist was tired and had flung himself back into the recesses of the big armchair. There he stayed with half-closed eyes and as quiet as quiet could be, while the other glanced down at him as he passed. When they were alone Mignon scorned to slap him at every turn. What good would it have

done, since nobody would have enjoyed the spectacle? He was far too disinterested to be personally entertained by the farcical scenes in which he figured as a bantering husband. Glad of this short-lived respite, Fauchery stretched his feet out languidly toward the fire and let his upturned eyes wander from the barometer to the clock. In the course of his march Mignon planted himself in front of Potier's bust, looked at it without seeming to see it and then turned back to the window, outside which yawned the darkling gulf of the courtyard. The rain had ceased, and there was now a deep silence in the room, which the fierce heat of the coke fire and the flare of the gas jets rendered still more oppressive. Not a sound came from the wings: the staircase and the passages were deadly still.

That choking sensation of quiet, which behind the scenes immediately precedes the end of an act, had begun to pervade the empty greenroom. Indeed, the place seemed to be drowsing off through very breathlessness amid that faint murmur which the stage gives forth when the whole troupe are raising the deafening uproar of some grand finale.

"Oh, the cows!" Bordenave suddenly shouted in his hoarse voice.

He had only just come up, and he was already howling complaints about two chorus girls who had nearly fallen flat on the stage because they were playing the fool together. When his eye lit on Mignon and Fauchery he called them; he wanted to show them something. The prince had just notified a desire to compliment Nana in her dressing room during the next interval. But as he was leading them into the wings the stage manager passed.

"Just you find those hags Fernande and Maria!" cried Bordenave savagely.

Then calming down and endeavoring to assume the dignified expression worn by "heavy fathers," he wiped his face with his pocket handkerchief and added:

"I am now going to receive His Highness."

The curtain fell amid a long-drawn salvo of applause. Then across the twilight stage, which was no longer lit up by the footlights, there followed a disorderly retreat. Actors and supers and chorus made haste to get back to their dressing rooms while the scenshifters rapidly changed the scenery. Simonne and Clarisse, however, had remained "at the top," talking together in whispers. On the stage, in an interval between their lines, they had just settled a little matter. Clarisse, after viewing the thing in every light, found she preferred not to see La Faloise, who could never decide to leave her for Gaga, and so Simonne was simply to go and explain that a woman ought not to be palled up to in that fashion! At last she agreed to undertake the mission.

Then Simonne, in her theatrical laundress's attire but with furs over her shoulders, ran down the greasy steps of the narrow, winding stairs which led between damp walls to the porter's lodge. This lodge, situated between the actors' staircase and that of the management, was shut in to right and left by large glass partitions and resembled a huge transparent lantern in which two gas jets were flaring.

There was a set of pigeonholes in the place in which were piled letters and newspapers, while on the table various bouquets lay awaiting their recipients

in close proximity to neglected heaps of dirty plates and to an old pair of stays, the eyelets of which the portress was busy mending. And in the middle of this untidy, ill-kept storeroom sat four fashionable, white-gloved society men. They occupied as many ancient straw-bottomed chairs and, with an expression at once patient and submissive, kept sharply turning their heads in Mme Bron's direction every time she came down from the theater overhead, for on such occasions she was the bearer of replies. Indeed, she had but now handed a note to a young man who had hurried out to open it beneath the gaslight in the vestibule, where he had grown slightly pale on reading the classic phrase—how often had others read it in that very place!—"Impossible tonight, my dearie! I'm booked!" La Faloise sat on one of these chairs at the back of the room, between the table and the stove. He seemed bent on passing the evening there, and yet he was not quite happy. Indeed, he kept tucking up his long legs in his endeavors to escape from a whole litter of black kittens who were gamboling wildly round them while the mother cat sat bolt upright, staring at him with yellow eyes.

"Ah, it's you, Mademoiselle Simonne! What can I do for you?" asked the portress.

Simonne begged her to send La Faloise out to her. But Mme Bron was unable to comply with her wishes all at once. Under the stairs in a sort of deep cupboard she kept a little bar, whither the supers were wont to descend for drinks between the acts, and seeing that just at that moment there were five or six tall lubbers there who, still dressed as Boule Noire masqueraders, were dying of thirst and in a great hurry, she lost her head a bit. A gas jet was flaring in the cupboard, within which it was possible to descry a tin-covered table and some shelves garnished with half-emptied bottles. Whenever the door of this coalhole was opened a violent whiff of alcohol mingled with the scent of stale cooking in the lodge, as well as with the penetrating scent of the flowers upon the table.

"Well now," continued the portress when she had served the supers, "is it the little dark chap out there you want?"

"No, no; don't be silly!" said Simonne. "It's the lanky one by the side of the stove. Your cat's sniffing at his trouser legs!"

And with that she carried La Faloise off into the lobby, while the other gentlemen once more resigned themselves to their fate and to semisuffocation and the masqueraders drank on the stairs and indulged in rough horseplay and guttural drunken jests.

On the stage above Bordenave was wild with the sceneshifters, who seemed never to have done changing scenes. They appeared to be acting of set purpose—the prince would certainly have some set piece or other tumbling on his head.

"Up with it! Up with it!" shouted the foreman.

At length the canvas at the back of the stage was raised into position, and the stage was clear. Mignon, who had kept his eye on Fauchery, seized this opportunity in order to start his pummeling matches again. He hugged him in his long arms and cried:

"Oh, take care! That mast just missed crushing you!"

And he carried him off and shook him before setting him down again. In view of the sceneshifters' exaggerated mirth, Fauchery grew white. His lips trembled, and he was ready to flare up in anger while Mignon, shamming good nature, was clapping him on the shoulder with such affectionate violence as nearly to pulverize him.

"I value your health, I do!" he kept repeating. "Egad! I should be in a pretty pickle if anything serious happened to you!"

But just then a whisper ran through their midst: "The prince! The prince!" And everybody turned and looked at the little door which opened out of the main body of the house. At first nothing was visible save Bordenave's round back and beefy neck, which bobbed down and arched up in a series of obsequious obeisances. Then the prince made his appearance. Largely and strongly built, light of beard and rosy of hue, he was not lacking in the kind of distinction peculiar to a sturdy man of pleasure, the square contours of whose limbs are clearly defined by the irreproachable cut of a frock coat. Behind him walked Count Muffat and the Marquis de Chouard, but this particular corner of the theater being dark, the group were lost to view amid huge moving shadows.

In order fittingly to address the son of a queen, who would someday occupy a throne, Bordenave had assumed the tone of a man exhibiting a bear in the street. In a voice tremulous with false emotion he kept repeating:

"If His Highness will have the goodness to follow me—would His Highness deign to come this way? His Highness will take care!"

The prince did not hurry in the least. On the contrary, he was greatly interested and kept pausing in order to look at the sceneshifters' maneuvers. A batten had just been lowered, and the group of gaslights high up among its iron crossbars illuminated the stage with a wide beam of light. Muffat, who had never yet been behind scenes at a theater, was even more astonished than the rest. An uneasy feeling of mingled fear and vague repugnance took possession of him. He looked up into the heights above him, where more battens, the gas jets on which were burning low, gleamed like galaxies of little bluish stars amid a chaos of iron rods, connecting lines of all sizes, hanging stages and canvases spread out in space, like huge cloths hung out to dry.

"Lower away!" shouted the foreman unexpectedly.

And the prince himself had to warn the count, for a canvas was descending. They were setting the scenery for the third act, which was the grotto on Mount Etna. Men were busy planting masts in the sockets, while others went and took frames which were leaning against the walls of the stage and proceeded to lash them with strong cords to the poles already in position. At the back of the stage, with a view to producing the bright rays thrown by Vulcan's glowing forge, a stand had been fixed by a limelight man, who was now lighting various burners under red glasses. The scene was one of confusion, verging to all appearances on absolute chaos, but every little move had been prearranged. Nay, amid all the scurry the whistle blower even took a few turns, stepping short as he did so, in order to rest his legs.

"His Highness overwhelms me," said Bordenave, still bowing low. "The

theater is not large, but we do what we can. Now if His Highness deigns to follow me——”

Count Muffat was already making for the dressing-room passage. The really sharp downward slope of the stage had surprised him disagreeably, and he owed no small part of his present anxiety to a feeling that its boards were moving under his feet. Through the open sockets gas was descried burning in the “dock.” Human voices and blasts of air, as from a vault, came up thence, and, looking down into the depths of gloom, one became aware of a whole subterranean existence. But just as the count was going up the stage a small incident occurred to stop him. Two little women, dressed for the third act, were chatting by the peephole in the curtain. One of them, straining forward and widening the hole with her fingers in order the better to observe things, was scanning the house beyond.

“I see him,” said she sharply. “Oh, what a mug!”

Horried, Bordenave had much ado not to give her a kick. But the prince smiled and looked pleased and excited by the remark. He gazed warmly at the little woman who did not care a button for His Highness, and she, on her part, laughed unblushingly. Bordenave, however, persuaded the prince to follow him. Muffat was beginning to perspire; he had taken his hat off. What inconvenienced him most was the stuffy, dense, overheated air of the place with its strong, haunting smell, a smell peculiar to this part of a theater, and, as such, compact of the reek of gas, of the glue used in the manufacture of the scenery, of dirty dark nooks and corners and of questionably clean chorus girls. In the passage the air was still more suffocating, and one seemed to breathe a poisoned atmosphere, which was occasionally relieved by the acid scents of toilet waters and the perfumes of various soaps emanating from the dressing rooms. The count lifted his eyes as he passed and glanced up the staircase, for he was well-nigh startled by the keen flood of light and warmth which flowed down upon his back and shoulders. High up above him there was a clicking of ewers and basins, a sound of laughter and of people calling to one another, a banging of doors, which in their continual opening and shutting allowed an odor of womankind to escape—a musky scent of oils and essences mingling with the natural pungency exhaled from human tresses. He did not stop. Nay, he hastened his walk: he almost ran, his skin tingling with the breath of that fiery approach to a world he knew nothing of.

“A theater’s a curious sight, eh?” said the Marquis de Chouard with the enchanted expression of a man who once more finds himself amid familiar surroundings.

But Bordenave had at length reached Nana’s dressing room at the end of the passage. He quietly turned the door handle; then, cringing again:

“If His Highness will have the goodness to enter——”

They heard the cry of a startled woman and caught sight of Nana as, stripped to the waist, she slipped behind a curtain while her dresser, who had been in the act of drying her, stood, towel in air, before them.

“Oh, it is silly to come in that way!” cried Nana from her hiding place. “Don’t come in; you see you mustn’t come in!”

Bordenave did not seem to relish this sudden flight.

"Do stay where you were, my dear. Why, it doesn't matter," he said. "It's His Highness. Come, come, don't be childish."

And when she still refused to make her appearance—for she was startled as yet, though she had begun to laugh—he added in peevish, paternal tones:

"Good heavens, these gentlemen know perfectly well what a woman looks like. They won't eat you."

"I'm not so sure of that," said the prince wittily.

With that the whole company began laughing in an exaggerated manner in order to pay him proper court.

"An exquisitely witty speech—an altogether Parisian speech," as Bordenave remarked.

Nana vouchsafed no further reply, but the curtain began moving. Doubtless she was making up her mind. Then Count Muffat, with glowing cheeks, began to take stock of the dressing room. It was a square room with a very low ceiling, and it was entirely hung with a light-colored Havana stuff. A curtain of the same material depended from a copper rod and formed a sort of recess at the end of the room, while two large windows opened on the courtyard of the theater and were faced, at a distance of three yards at most, by a leprous-looking wall against which the panes cast squares of yellow light amid the surrounding darkness. A large dressing glass faced a white marble toilet table, which was garnished with a disorderly array of flasks and glass boxes containing oils, essences and powders. The count went up to the dressing glass and discovered that he was looking very flushed and had small drops of perspiration on his forehead. He dropped his eyes and came and took up a position in front of the toilet table, where the basin, full of soapy water, the small, scattered, ivory toilet utensils and the damp sponges, appeared for some moments to absorb his attention. The feeling of dizziness which he had experienced when he first visited Nana in the Boulevard Haussmann once more overcame him. He felt the thick carpet soften under foot, and the gasjets burning by the dressing table and by the glass seemed to shoot whistling flames about his temples. For one moment, being afraid of fainting away under the influence of those feminine odors which he now re-encountered, intensified by the heat under the low-pitched ceiling, he sat down on the edge of a softly padded divan between the two windows. But he got up again almost directly and, returning to the dressing table, seemed to gaze with vacant eyes into space, for he was thinking of a bouquet of tuberoses which had once faded in his bedroom and had nearly killed him in their death. When tuberoses are turning brown they have a human smell.

"Make haste!" Bordenave whispered, putting his head in behind the curtain.

The prince, however, was listening complaisantly to the Marquis de Chouard, who had taken up a hare's-foot on the dressing table and had begun explaining the way grease paint is put on. In a corner of the room Satin, with her pure, virginal face, was scanning the gentlemen keenly, while the dresser, Mme Jules by name, was getting ready Venus' tights and tunic. Mme Jules was a woman of no age. She had the parchment skin and changeless features peculiar to old

maids whom no one ever knew in their younger years. She had indeed shriveled up in the burning atmosphere of the dressing rooms and amid the most famous thighs and bosoms in all Paris. She wore everlastingly a faded black dress, and on her flat and sexless chest a perfect forest of pins clustered above the spot where her heart should have been.

"I beg your pardon, gentlemen," said Nana, drawing aside the curtain, "but you took me by surprise."

They all turned round. She had not clothed herself at all, had, in fact, only buttoned on a little pair of linen stays which half revealed her bosom. When the gentlemen had put her to flight she had scarcely begun undressing and was rapidly taking off her fishwife's costume. Through the opening in her drawers behind a corner of her shift was even now visible. There she stood, bare-armed, bare-shouldered, bare-breasted, in all the adorable glory of her youth and plump, fair beauty, but she still held the curtain with one hand, as though ready to draw it to again upon the slightest provocation.

"Yes, you took me by surprise! I never shall dare—" she stammered in pretty, mock confusion, while rosy blushes crossed her neck and shoulders and smiles of embarrassment played about her lips.

"Oh, don't apologize," cried Bordenave, "since these gentlemen approve of your good looks!"

But she still tried the hesitating, innocent, girlish game, and, shivering as though someone were tickling her, she continued:

"His Highness does me too great an honor. I beg His Highness will excuse my receiving him thus—"

"It is I who am importunate," said the prince, "but, madame, I could not resist the desire of complimenting you."

Thereupon, in order to reach her dressing table, she walked very quietly and just as she was through the midst of the gentlemen, who made way for her to pass.

She had strongly marked hips, which filled her drawers out roundly, while with swelling bosom she still continued bowing and smiling her delicate little smile. Suddenly she seemed to recognize Count Muffat, and she extended her hand to him as an old friend. Then she scolded him for not having come to her supper party. His Highness deigned to chaff Muffat about this, and the latter stammered and thrilled again at the thought that for one second he had held in his own feverish clasp a little fresh and perfumed hand. The count had dined excellently at the prince's, who, indeed, was a heroic eater and drinker. Both of them were even a little intoxicated, but they behaved very creditably. To hide the commotion within him Muffat could only remark about the heat.

"Good heavens, how hot it is here!" he said. "How do you manage to live in such a temperature, madame?"

And conversation was about to ensue on this topic when noisy voices were heard at the dressing-room door. Bordenave drew back the slide over a grated peephole of the kind used in convents. Fontan was outside with Prullière and Bosc, and all three had bottles under their arms and their hands full of glasses.

He began knocking and shouting out that it was his patron saint's day and that he was standing champagne round. Nana consulted the prince with a glance. Eh! Oh dear, yes! His Highness did not want to be in anyone's way; he would be only too happy! But without waiting for permission Fontan came in, repeating in baby accents:

"Me not a cad, me pay for champagne!"

Then all of a sudden he became aware of the prince's presence of which he had been totally ignorant. He stopped short and, assuming an air of farcical solemnity, announced:

"King Dagobert is in the corridor and is desirous of drinking the health of His Royal Highness."

The prince having made answer with a smile, Fontan's sally was voted charming. But the dressing room was too small to accommodate everybody, and it became necessary to crowd up anyhow, Satin and Mme Jules standing back against the curtain at the end and the men clustering closely round the half-naked Nana. The three actors still had on the costumes they had been wearing in the second act, and while Prullière took off his Alpine admiral's cocked hat, the huge plume of which would have knocked the ceiling, Bosc, in his purple cloak and tinware crown, steadied himself on his tipsy old legs and greeted the prince as became a monarch receiving the son of a powerful neighbor. The glasses were filled, and the company began clinking them together.

"I drink to Your Highness!" said ancient Bosc royally.

"To the army!" added Prullière.

"To Venus!" cried Fontan.

The prince complaisantly poised his glass, waited quietly, bowed thrice and murmured:

"Madame! Admiral! Your Majesty!"

Then he drank it off. Count Muffat and the Marquis de Chouard had followed his example. There was no more jesting now—the company were at court. Actual life was prolonged in the life of the theater, and a sort of solemn farce was enacted under the hot flare of the gas. Nana, quite forgetting that she was in her drawers and that a corner of her shift stuck out behind, became the great lady, the queen of love, in act to open her most private palace chambers to state dignitaries. In every sentence she used the words "Royal Highness" and, bowing with the utmost conviction, treated the masqueraders, Bosc and Prullière, as if the one were a sovereign and the other his attendant minister. And no one dreamed of smiling at this strange contrast, this real prince, this heir to a throne, drinking a petty actor's champagne and taking his ease amid a carnival of gods, a masquerade of royalty, in the society of dressers and courtesans, shabby players and showmen of venal beauty. Bordenave was simply ravished by the dramatic aspects of the scene and began dreaming of the receipts which would have accrued had His Highness only consented thus to appear in the second act of the *Blonde Venus*.

"I say, shall we have our little women down?" he cried, becoming familiar.

Nana would not hear of it. But notwithstanding this, she was giving way herself. Fontan attracted her with his comic make-up. She brushed against

him and, eying him as a woman in the family way might do when she fancies some unpleasant kind of food, she suddenly became extremely familiar:

"Now then, fill up again, ye great brute!"

Fontan charged the glasses afresh, and the company drank, repeating the same toasts.

"To His Highness!"

"To the army!"

"To Venus!"

But with that Nana made a sign and obtained silence. She raised her glass and cried:

"No, no! To Fontan! It's Fontan's day; to Fontan! To Fontan!"

Then they clinked glasses a third time and drank Fontan with all the honors. The prince, who had noticed the young woman devouring the actor with her eyes, saluted him with a "Monsieur Fontan, I drink to your success!" This he said with his customary courtesy.

But meanwhile the tail of his highness's frock coat was sweeping the marble of the dressing table. The place, indeed, was like an alcove or narrow bathroom, full as it was of the steam of hot water and sponges and of the strong scent of essences which mingled with the tartish, intoxicating fumes of the champagne. The prince and Count Muffat, between whom Nana was wedged, had to lift up their hands so as not to brush against her hips or her breast with every little movement. And there stood Mme Jules, waiting, cool and rigid as ever, while Satin, marveling in the depths of her vicious soul to see a prince and two gentlemen in black coats going after a naked woman in the society of dressed-up actors, secretly concluded that fashionable people were not so very particular after all.

But Father Barillot's tinkling bell approached along the passage. At the door of the dressing room he stood amazed when he caught sight of the three actors still clad in the costumes which they had worn in the second act.

"Gentlemen, gentlemen," he stammered, "do please make haste. They've just rung the bell in the public foyer."

"Bah, the public will have to wait!" said Bordenave placidly.

However, as the bottles were now empty, the comedians went upstairs to dress after yet another interchange of civilities. Bosc, having dipped his beard in the champagne, had taken it off, and under his venerable disguise the drunkard had suddenly reappeared. His was the haggard, empurpled face of the old actor who has taken to drink. At the foot of the stairs he was heard remarking to Fontan in his boozy voice:

"I pulverized him, eh?"

He was alluding to the prince.

In Nana's dressing room none now remained save His Highness, the count and the marquis. Bordenave had withdrawn with Barillot, whom he advised not to knock without first letting Madame know.

"You will excuse me, gentlemen?" asked Nana, again setting to work to make up her arms and face, of which she was now particularly careful, owing to her nude appearance in the third act.

The prince seated himself by the Marquis de Chouard on the divan, and Count Muffat alone remained standing. In that suffocating heat the two glasses of champagne they had drunk had increased their intoxication. Satin, when she saw the gentlemen thus closeting themselves with her friend, had deemed it discreet to vanish behind the curtain, where she sat waiting on a trunk, much annoyed at being compelled to remain motionless, while Mme Jules came and went quietly without word or look.

"You sang your numbers marvelously," said the prince.

And with that they began a conversation, but their sentences were short and their pauses frequent. Nana, indeed, was not always able to reply. After rubbing cold cream over her arms and face with the palm of her hand she laid on the grease paint with the corner of a towel. For one second only she ceased looking in the glass and smilingly stole a glance at the prince.

"His Highness is spoiling me," she murmured without putting down the grease paint.

Her task was a complicated one, and the Marquis de Chouard followed it with an expression of devout enjoyment. He spoke in his turn.

"Could not the band accompany you more softly?" he said. "It drowns your voice, and that's an unpardonable crime."

This time Nana did not turn round. She had taken up the hare's-foot and was lightly manipulating it. All her attention was concentrated on this action, and she bent forward over her toilet table so very far that the white round contour of her drawers and the little patch of chemise stood out with the unwonted tension. But she was anxious to prove that she appreciated the old man's compliment and therefore made a little swinging movement with her hips.

Silence reigned. Mme Jules had noticed a tear in the right leg of her drawers. She took a pin from over her heart and for a second or so knelt on the ground, busily at work about Nana's leg, while the young woman, without seeming to notice her presence, applied the rice powder, taking extreme pains, as she did so, to avoid putting any on the upper part of her cheeks. But when the prince remarked that if she were to come and sing in London all England would want to applaud her, she laughed amiably and turned round for a moment with her left cheek looking very white amid a perfect cloud of powder. Then she became suddenly serious, for she had come to the operation of rouging. And with her face once more close to the mirror, she dipped her finger in a jar and began applying the rouge below her eyes and gently spreading it back toward her temples. The gentlemen maintained a respectful silence.

Count Muffat, indeed, had not yet opened his lips. He was thinking perforce of his own youth. The bedroom of his childish days had been quite cold, and later, when he had reached the age of sixteen and would give his mother a good-night kiss every evening, he used to carry the icy feeling of the embrace into the world of dreams. One day in passing a half-open door he had caught sight of a maidservant washing herself, and that was the solitary recollection which had in any way troubled his peace of mind from the days of puberty till the time of marriage. Afterward he had found his wife strictly obedient to her conjugal duties but had himself felt a species of religious dislike to them.

He had grown to man's estate and was now aging, in ignorance of the flesh, in the humble observance of rigid devotional practices and in obedience to a rule of life full of precepts and moral laws. And now suddenly he was dropped down in this actress's dressing room in the presence of this undraped courtesan.

He, who had never seen the Countess Muffat putting on her garters, was witnessing, amid that wild disarray of jars and basins and that strong, sweet perfume, the intimate details of a woman's toilet. His whole being was in turmoil; he was terrified by the stealthy, all-pervading influence which for some time past Nana's presence had been exercising over him, and he recalled to mind the pious accounts of diabolic possession which had amused his early years. He was a believer in the devil, and, in a confused kind of way, Nana was he, with her laughter and her bosom and her hips, which seemed swollen with many vices. But he promised himself that he would be strong—nay, he would know how to defend himself.

"Well then, it's agreed," said the prince, lounging quite comfortably on the divan. "You will come to London next year, and we shall receive you so cordially that you will never return to France again. Ah, my dear Count, you don't value your pretty women enough. We shall take them all from you!"

"That won't make much odds to him," murmured the Marquis de Chouard wickedly, for he occasionally said a risky thing among friends. "The count is virtue itself."

Hearing his virtue mentioned, Nana looked at him so comically that Muffat felt a keen twinge of annoyance. But directly afterward he was surprised and angry with himself. Why, in the presence of this courtesan, should the idea of being virtuous embarrass him? He could have struck her. But in attempting to take up a brush Nana had just let it drop on the ground, and as she stooped to pick it up he rushed forward. Their breath mingled for one moment, and the loosened tresses of Venus flowed over his hands. But remorse mingled with his enjoyment, a kind of enjoyment, moreover, peculiar to good Catholics, whom the fear of hell torments in the midst of their sin.

At this moment Father Barillot's voice was heard outside the door.

"May I give the knocks, madame? The house is growing impatient."

"All in good time," answered Nana quietly.

She had dipped her paint brush in a pot of kohl, and with the point of her nose close to the glass and her left eye closed she passed it delicately along between her eyelashes. Muffat stood behind her, looking on. He saw her reflection in the mirror, with her rounded shoulders and her bosom half hidden by a rosy shadow. And despite all his endeavors he could not turn away his gaze from that face so merry with dimples and so worn with desire, which the closed eye rendered more seductive. When she shut her right eye and passed the brush along it he understood that he belonged to her.

"They are stamping their feet, madame," the callboy once more cried. "They'll end by smashing the seats. May I give the knocks?"

"Oh, bother!" said Nana impatiently. "Knock away; I don't care! If I'm not ready, well, they'll have to wait for me!"

She grew calm again and, turning to the gentlemen, added with a smile: "It's true: we've only got a minute left for our talk."

Her face and arms were now finished, and with her fingers she put two large dabs of carmine on her lips. Count Muffat felt more excited than ever. He was ravished by the perverse transformation wrought by powders and paints and filled by a lawless yearning for those young painted charms, for the too-red mouth and the too-white face and the exaggerated eyes, ringed round with black and burning and dying for very love. Meanwhile Nana went behind the curtain for a second or two in order to take off her drawers and slip on Venus' tights. After which, with tranquil immodesty, she came out and undid her little linen stays and held out her arms to Mme Jules, who drew the short-sleeved tunic over them.

"Make haste; they're growing angry!" she muttered.

The prince with half-closed eyes marked the swelling lines of her bosom with an air of connoisseurship, while the Marquis de Chouard wagged his head involuntarily. Muffat gazed at the carpet in order not to see any more. At length Venus, with only her gauze veil over her shoulders, was ready to go on the stage. Mme Jules, with vacant, unconcerned eyes and an expression suggestive of a little elderly wooden doll, still kept circling round her. With brisk movements she took pins out of the inexhaustible pincushion over her heart and pinned up Venus' tunic, but as she ran over all those plump nude charms with her shriveled hands, nothing was suggested to her. She was as one whom her sex does not concern.

"There!" said the young woman, taking a final look at herself in the mirror.

Bordenave was back again. He was anxious and said the third act had begun.

"Very well! I'm coming," replied Nana. "Here's a pretty fuss! Why, it's usually I that waits for the others."

The gentlemen left the dressing room, but they did not say good-by, for the prince had expressed a desire to assist behind the scenes at the performance of the third act. Left alone, Nana seemed greatly surprised and looked round her in all directions.

"Where can she be?" she queried.

She was searching for Satin. When she had found her again, waiting on her trunk behind the curtain, Satin quietly replied:

"Certainly I didn't want to be in your way with all those men there!"

And she added further that she was going now. But Nana held her back. What a silly girl she was! Now that Bordenave had agreed to take her on! Why, the bargain was to be struck after the play was over! Satin hesitated. There were too many bothers; she was out of her element! Nevertheless, she stayed.

As the prince was coming down the little wooden staircase a strange sound of smothered oaths and stamping, scuffling feet became audible on the other side of the theater. The actors waiting for their cues were being scared by quite a serious episode. For some seconds past Mignon had been renewing his jokes and smothering Fauchery with caresses. He had at last invented a little game of a novel kind and had begun flicking the other's nose in order, as he

phrased it, to keep the flies off him. This kind of game naturally diverted the actors to any extent.

But success had suddenly thrown Mignon off his balance. He had launched forth into extravagant courses and had given the journalist a box on the ear, an actual, a vigorous, box on the ear. This time he had gone too far: in the presence of so many spectators it was impossible for Fauchery to pocket such a blow with laughing equanimity. Whereupon the two men had desisted from their farce, had sprung at one another's throats, their faces livid with hate, and were now rolling over and over behind a set of side lights, pounding away at each other as though they weren't breakable.

"Monsieur Bordenave, Monsieur Bordenave!" said the stage manager, coming up in a terrible flutter.

Bordenave made his excuses to the prince and followed him. When he recognized Fauchery and Mignon in the men on the floor he gave vent to an expression of annoyance. They had chosen a nice time, certainly, with His Highness on the other side of the scenery and all that houseful of people who might have overheard the row! To make matters worse, Rose Mignon arrived out of breath at the very moment she was due on the stage. Vulcan, indeed, was giving her the cue, but Rose stood rooted to the ground, marveling at sight of her husband and her lover as they lay wallowing at her feet, strangling one another, kicking, tearing their hair out and whitening their coats with dust. They barred the way. A sceneshifter had even stopped Fauchery's hat just when the devilish thing was going to bound onto the stage in the middle of the struggle. Meanwhile Vulcan, who had been gagging away to amuse the audience, gave Rose her cue a second time. But she stood motionless, still gazing at the two men.

"Oh, don't look at *them*!" Bordenave furiously whispered to her. "Go on the stage; go on, do! It's no business of yours! Why, you're missing your cue!"

And with a push from the manager, Rose stepped over the prostrate bodies and found herself in the flare of the footlights and in the presence of the audience. She had quite failed to understand why they were fighting on the floor behind her. Trembling from head to foot and with a humming in her ears, she came down to the footlights, Diana's sweet, amorous smile on her lips, and attacked the opening lines of her duet with so feeling a voice that the public gave her a veritable ovation.

Behind the scenery she could hear the dull thuds caused by the two men. They had rolled down to the wings, but fortunately the music covered the noise made by their feet as they kicked against them.

"By God!" yelled Bordenave in exasperation when at last he had succeeded in separating them. "Why couldn't you fight at home? You know as well as I do that I don't like this sort of thing. You, Mignon, you'll do me the pleasure of staying over here on the prompt side, and you, Fauchery, if you leave the O.P. side I'll chuck you out of the theater. You understand, eh? Prompt side and O.P. side or I forbid Rose to bring you here at all."

When he returned to the prince's presence the latter asked what was the matter.

"Oh, nothing at all," he murmured quietly.

Nana was standing wrapped in furs, talking to these gentlemen while awaiting her cue. As Count Muffat was coming up in order to peep between two of the wings at the stage, he understood from a sign made him by the stage manager that he was to step softly. Drowsy warmth was streaming down from the flies, and in the wings, which were lit by vivid patches of light, only a few people remained, talking in low voices or making off on tiptoe. The gasman was at his post amid an intricate arrangement of cocks; a fireman, leaning against the side lights, was craning forward, trying to catch a glimpse of things, while on his seat, high up, the curtain man was watching with resigned expression, careless of the play, constantly on the alert for the bell to ring him to his duty among the ropes. And amid the close air and the shuffling of feet and the sound of whispering, the voices of the actors on the stage sounded strange, deadened, surprisingly discordant. Farther off again, above the confused noises of the band, a vast breathing sound was audible. It was the breath of the house, which sometimes swelled up till it burst in vague rumors, in laughter, in applause. Though invisible, the presence of the public could be felt, even in the silences.

"There's something open," said Nana sharply, and with that she tightened the folds of her fur cloak. "Do look, Barillot. I bet they've just opened a window. Why, one might catch one's death of cold here!"

Barillot swore that he had closed every window himself but suggested that possibly there were broken panes about. The actors were always complaining of drafts. Through the heavy warmth of that gaslit region blasts of cold air were constantly passing—it was a regular influenza trap, as Fontan phrased it.

"I should like to see *you* in a low-cut dress," continued Nana, growing annoyed.

"Hush!" murmured Bordenave.

On the stage Rose rendered a phrase in her duet so cleverly that the stalls burst into universal applause. Nana was silent at this, and her face grew grave. Meanwhile the count was venturing down a passage when Barillot stopped him and said he would make a discovery there. Indeed, he obtained an oblique back view of the scenery and of the wings which had been strengthened, as it were, by a thick layer of old posters. Then he caught sight of a corner of the stage, of the Etna cave hollowed out in a silver mine and of Vulcan's forge in the background. Battens, lowered from above, lit up a sparkling substance which had been laid on with large dabs of the brush. Side lights with red glasses and blue were so placed as to produce the appearance of a fiery brazier, while on the floor of the stage, in the far background, long lines of gaslight had been laid down in order to throw a wall of dark rocks into sharp relief. Hard by on a gentle, "practicable" incline, amid little points of light resembling the illumination lamps scattered about in the grass on the night of a public holiday, old Mme Drouard, who played Juno, was sitting dazed and sleepy, waiting for her cue.

Presently there was a commotion, for Simonne, while listening to a story Clarisse was telling her, cried out:

"My! It's the Tricon!"

It was indeed the Tricon, wearing the same old curls and looking as like a litigious great lady as ever.

When she saw Nana she went straight up to her.

"No," said the latter after some rapid phrases had been exchanged, "not now."

The old lady looked grave. Just then Prullière passed by and shook hands with her, while two little chorus girls stood gazing at her with looks of deep emotion. For a moment she seemed to hesitate. Then she beckoned to Simonne, and the rapid exchange of sentences began again.

"Yes," said Simonne at last. "In half an hour."

But as she was going upstairs again to her dressing room, Mme Bron, who was once more going the rounds with letters, presented one to her. Bordenave lowered his voice and furiously reproached the portress for having allowed the Tricon to come in. That woman! And on such an evening of all others! It made him so angry because His Highness was there! Mme Bron, who had been thirty years in the theater, replied quite sourly. How was she to know? she asked. The Tricon did business with all the ladies—M. le Directeur had met her a score of times without making remarks. And while Bordenave was muttering oaths the Tricon stood quietly by, scrutinizing the prince as became a woman who weighs a man at a glance. A smile lit up her yellow face. Presently she paced slowly off through the crowd of deeply deferential little women.

"Immediately, eh?" she queried, turning round again to Simonne.

Simonne seemed much worried. The letter was from a young man to whom she had engaged herself for that evening: She gave Mme Bron a scribbled note in which were the words, "Impossible tonight, darling—I'm booked." But she was still apprehensive; the young man might possibly wait for her in spite of everything. As she was not playing in the third act, she had a mind to be off at once and accordingly begged Clarisse to go and see if the man were there. Clarisse was only due on the stage toward the end of the act, and so she went downstairs while Simonne ran up for a minute to their common dressing room.

In Mme Bron's drinking bar downstairs a super, who was charged with the part of Pluto, was drinking in solitude amid the folds of a great red robe diapered with golden flames. The little business plied by the good portress must have been progressing finely, for the cellarlike hole under the stairs was wet with emptied heeltaps and water. Clarisse picked up the tunic of Iris, which was dragging over the greasy steps behind her, but she halted prudently at the turn in the stairs and was content simply to crane forward and peer into the lodge. She certainly had been quick to scent things out! Just fancy! That idiot La Faloise was still there, sitting on the same old chair between the table and the stove! He had made pretense of sneaking off in front of Simonne and had returned after her departure. For the matter of that, the lodge was still full of gentlemen who sat there gloved, elegant, submissive and patient as ever. They were all waiting and viewing each other gravely as they waited. On the table there were now only some dirty plates, Mme Bron having recently distributed the last of the bouquets. A single fallen rose was withering on the floor in the

neighborhood of the black cat, who had lain down and curled herself up while the kittens ran wild races and danced fierce gallops among the gentlemen's legs. Clarisse was momentarily inclined to turn La Faloise out. The idiot wasn't fond of animals, and that put the finishing touch to him! He was busy drawing in his legs because the cat was there, and he didn't want to touch her.

"He'll nip you; take care!" said Pluto, who was a joker, as he went upstairs, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand.

After that Clarisse gave up the idea of hauling La Faloise over the coals. She had seen Mme Bron giving the letter to Simonne's young man, and he had gone out to read it under the gas light in the lobby. "Impossible tonight, darling—I'm booked." And with that he had peaceably departed, as one who was doubtless used to the formula. He, at any rate, knew how to conduct himself! Not so the others, the fellows who sat there doggedly on Mme Bron's battered straw-bottomed chairs under the great glazed lantern, where the heat was enough to roast you and there was an unpleasant odor. What a lot of men it must have held! Clarisse went upstairs again in disgust, crossed over behind scenes and nimbly mounted three flights of steps which led to the dressing rooms, in order to bring Simonne her reply.

Downstairs the prince had withdrawn from the rest and stood talking to Nana. He never left her; he stood brooding over her through half-shut eyelids. Nana did not look at him but, smiling, nodded yes. Suddenly, however, Count Muffat obeyed an overmastering impulse, and leaving Bordenave, who was explaining to him the working of the rollers and windlasses, he came up in order to interrupt their confabulations. Nana lifted her eyes and smiled at him as she smiled at His Highness. But she kept her ears open notwithstanding, for she was waiting for her cue.

"The third act is the shortest, I believe," the prince began saying, for the count's presence embarrassed him.

She did not answer; her whole expression altered; she was suddenly intent on her business. With a rapid movement of the shoulders she had let her furs slip from her, and Mme Jules, standing behind, had caught them in her arms. And then after passing her two hands to her hair as though to make it fast, she went on the stage in all her nudity.

"Hush, hush!" whispered Bordenave.

The count and the prince had been taken by surprise. There was profound silence, and then a deep sigh and the far-off murmur of a multitude became audible. Every evening when Venus entered in her godlike nakedness the same effect was produced. Then Muffat was seized with a desire to see; he put his eye to the peephole. Above and beyond the glowing arc formed by the foot-lights the dark body of the house seemed full of ruddy vapor, and against this neutral-tinted background, where row upon row of faces struck a pale, uncertain note, Nana stood forth white and vast, so that the boxes from the balcony to the flies were blotted from view. He saw her from behind, noted her swelling hips, her outstretched arms, while down on the floor, on the same level as her feet, the prompter's head—an old man's head with a humble, honest face—stood on the edge of the stage, looking as though it had been

severed from the body. At certain points in her opening number an undulating movement seemed to run from her neck to her waist and to die out in the trailing border of her tunic. When amid a tempest of applause she had sung her last note she bowed, and the gauze floated forth round about her limbs, and her hair swept over her waist as she bent sharply backward. And seeing her thus, as with bending form and with exaggerated hips she came backing toward the count's peephole, he stood upright again, and his face was very white. The stage had disappeared, and he now saw only the reverse side of the scenery with its display of old posters pasted up in every direction. On the practicable slope, among the lines of gas jets, the whole of Olympus had re-joined the dozing Mme Drouard. They were waiting for the close of the act. Bosc and Fontan sat on the floor with their knees drawn up to their chins, and Prullière stretched himself and yawned before going on. Everybody was worn out; their eyes were red, and they were longing to go home to sleep.

Just then Fauchery, who had been prowling about on the O.P. side ever since Bordenave had forbidden him the other, came and buttonholed the count in order to keep himself in countenance and offered at the same time to show him the dressing rooms. An increasing sense of languor had left Muffat without any power of resistance, and after looking round for the Marquis de Chouard, who had disappeared, he ended by following the journalist. He experienced a mingled feeling of relief and anxiety as he left the wings whence he had been listening to Nana's songs.

Fauchery had already preceded him up the staircase, which was closed on the first and second floors by low-paneled doors. It was one of those stairways which you find in miserable tenements. Count Muffat had seen many such during his rounds as member of the Benevolent Organization. It was bare and dilapidated: there was a wash of yellow paint on its walls; its steps had been worn by the incessant passage of feet, and its iron balustrade had grown smooth under the friction of many hands. On a level with the floor on every stairhead there was a low window which resembled a deep, square venthole, while in lanterns fastened to the walls flaring gas jets crudely illuminated the surrounding squalor and gave out a glowing heat which, as it mounted up the narrow stairwell, grew ever more intense.

When he reached the foot of the stairs the count once more felt the hot breath upon his neck and shoulders. As of old it was laden with the odor of women, wafted amid floods of light and sound from the dressing rooms above, and now with every upward step he took the musky scent of powders and the tart perfume of toilet vinegars heated and bewildered him more and more. On the first floor two corridors ran backward, branching sharply off and presenting a set of doors to view which were painted yellow and numbered with great white numerals in such a way as to suggest a hotel with a bad reputation. The tiles on the floor had been many of them unbedded, and the old house being in a state of subsidence, they stuck up like hummocks. The count dashed recklessly forward, glanced through a half-open door and saw a very dirty room which resembled a barber's shop in a poor part of the town. In was furnished with two chairs, a mirror and a small table containing a drawer which

had been blackened by the grease from brushes and combs. A great perspiring fellow with smoking shoulders was changing his linen there, while in a similar room next door a woman was drawing on her gloves preparatory to departure. Her hair was damp and out of curl, as though she had just had a bath. But Fauchery began calling the count, and the latter was rushing up without delay when a furious "damn!" burst from the corridor on the right. Mathilde, a little drab of a miss, had just broken her washhand basin, the soapy water from which was flowing out to the stairhead. A dressing room door banged noisily. Two women in their stays skipped across the passage, and another, with the hem of her shift in her mouth, appeared and immediately vanished from view. Then followed a sound of laughter, a dispute, the snatch of a song which was suddenly broken off short. All along the passage naked gleams, sudden visions of white skin and wan underlinen were observable through chinks in doorways. Two girls were making very merry, showing each other their birthmarks. One of them, a very young girl, almost a child, had drawn her skirts up over her knees in order to sew up a rent in her drawers, and the dressers, catching sight of the two men, drew some curtains half to for decency's sake. The wild stampede which follows the end of a play had already begun, the grand removal of white paint and rouge, the reassumption amid clouds of rice powder of ordinary attire. The strange animal scent came in whiffs of redoubled intensity through the lines of banging doors. On the third story Muffat abandoned himself to the feeling of intoxication which was overpowering him. For the chorus girls' dressing room was there, and you saw a crowd of twenty women and a wild display of soaps and flasks of lavender water. The place resembled the common room in a slum lodging house. As he passed by he heard fierce sounds of washing behind a closed door and a perfect storm raging in a washhand basin. And as he was mounting up to the topmost story of all, curiosity led him to risk one more little peep through an open loophole. The room was empty, and under the flare of the gas a solitary chamber pot stood forgotten among a heap of petticoats trailing on the floor. This room afforded him his ultimate impression. Upstairs on the fourth floor he was well-nigh suffocated. All the scents, all the blasts of heat, had found their goal there. The yellow ceiling looked as if it had been baked, and a lamp burned amid fumes of russet-colored fog. For some seconds he leaned upon the iron balustrade which felt warm and damp and well-nigh human to the touch. And he shut his eyes and drew a long breath and drank in the sexual atmosphere of the place. Hitherto he had been utterly ignorant of it, but now it beat full in his face.

"Do come here," shouted Fauchery, who had vanished some moments ago. "You're being asked for."

At the end of the corridor was the dressing room belonging to Clarisse and Simonne. It was a long, ill-built room under the roof with a garret ceiling and sloping walls. The light penetrated to it from two deep-set openings high up in the wall, but at that hour of the night the dressing room was lit by flaring gas. It was papered with a paper at seven sous a roll with a pattern of roses twining over green trelliswork. Two boards, placed near one another and covered with

oilcloth, did duty for dressing tables. They were black with spilled water, and underneath them was a fine medley of dented zinc jugs, slop pails and coarse yellow earthenware crocks. There was an array of fancy articles in the room—a battered, soiled and well-worn array of chipped basins, of toothless combs, of all those manifold untidy trifles which, in their hurry and carelessness, two women will leave scattered about when they undress and wash together amid purely temporary surroundings, the dirty aspect of which has ceased to concern them.

"Do come here," Fauchery repeated with the good-humored familiarity which men adopt among their fallen sisters. "Clarisse is wanting to kiss you."

Muffat entered the room at last. But what was his surprise when he found the Marquis de Chouard snugly ensconced on a chair between the two dressing tables! The marquis had withdrawn thither some time ago. He was spreading his feet apart because a pail was leaking and letting a whitish flood spread over the floor. He was visibly much at his ease, as became a man who knew all the snug corners, and had grown quite merry in the close dressing room, where people might have been bathing, and amid those quietly immodest feminine surroundings which the uncleanness of the little place rendered at once natural and poignant.

"D'you go with the old boy?" Simonne asked Clarisse in a whisper.

"Rather!" replied the latter aloud.

The dresser, a very ugly and extremely familiar young girl, who was helping Simonne into her coat, positively writhed with laughter. The three pushed each other and babbled little phrases which redoubled their merriment.

"Come, Clarisse, kiss the gentleman," said Fauchery. "You know, he's got the rhino."

And turning to the count:

"You'll see, she's very nice! She's going to kiss you!"

But Clarisse was disgusted by the men. She spoke in violent terms of the dirty lot waiting at the porter's lodge down below. Besides, she was in a hurry to go downstairs again; they were making her miss her last scene. Then as Fauchery blocked up the doorway, she gave Muffat a couple of kisses on the whiskers, remarking as she did so:

"It's not for you, at any rate! It's for that nuisance Fauchery!"

And with that she darted off, and the count remained much embarrassed in his father-in-law's presence. The blood had rushed to his face. In Nana's dressing room, amid all the luxury of hangings and mirrors, he had not experienced the sharp physical sensation which the shameful wretchedness of that sorry garret excited within him, redolent as it was of these two girls' self-abandonment. Meanwhile the marquis had hurried in the rear of Simonne, who was making off at the top of her pace, and he kept whispering in her ear while she shook her head in token of refusal. Fauchery followed them, laughing. And with that the count found himself alone with the dresser, who was washing out the basins. Accordingly he took his departure, too, his legs almost failing under him. Once more he put up flights of half-dressed women and caused

doors to bang as he advanced. But amid the disorderly, disbanded troops of girls to be found on each of the four stories, he was only distinctly aware of a cat, a great tortoise-shell cat, which went gliding upstairs through the ovenlike place where the air was poisoned with musk, rubbing its back against the banisters and keeping its tail exceedingly erect.

"Yes, to be sure!" said a woman hoarsely. "I thought they'd keep us back tonight! What a nuisance they are with their calls!"

The end had come; the curtain had just fallen. There was a veritable stampede on the staircase—its walls rang with exclamations, and everyone was in a savage hurry to dress and be off. As Count Muffat came down the last step or two he saw Nana and the prince passing slowly along the passage. The young woman halted and lowered her voice as she said with a smile:

"All right then—by and by!"

The prince returned to the stage, where Bordenave was awaiting him. And left alone with Nana, Muffat gave way to an impulse of anger and desire. He ran up behind her and, as she was on the point of entering her dressing room, imprinted a rough kiss on her neck among little golden hairs curling low down between her shoulders. It was as though he had returned the kiss that had been given him upstairs. Nana was in a fury; she lifted her hand, but when she recognized the count she smiled.

"Oh, you frightened me," she said simply.

And her smile was adorable in its embarrassment and submissiveness, as though she had despaired of this kiss and were happy to have received it. But she could do nothing for him either that evening or the day after. It was a case of waiting. Nay, even if it had been in her power she would still have let herself be desired. Her glance said as much. At length she continued:

"I'm a landowner, you know. Yes, I'm buying a country house near Orleans, in a part of the world to which you sometimes betake yourself. Baby told me you did—little Georges Hugon, I mean. You know him? So come and see me down there."

The count was a shy man, and the thought of his roughness had frightened him; he was ashamed of what he had done and he bowed ceremoniously, promising at the same time to take advantage of her invitation. Then he walked off as one who dreams.

He was rejoining the prince when, passing in front of the foyer, he heard Satin screaming out:

"Oh, the dirty old thing! Just you bloody well leave me alone!"

It was the Marquis de Chouard who was tumbling down over Satin. The girl had decidedly had enough of the fashionable world! Nana had certainly introduced her to Bordenave, but the necessity of standing with sealed lips for fear of allowing some awkward phrase to escape her had been too much for her feelings, and now she was anxious to regain her freedom, the more so as she had run against an old flame of hers in the wings. This was the super, to whom the task of impersonating Pluto had been entrusted, a pastry cook, who had already treated her to a whole week of love and flagellation. She was waiting for him, much irritated at the things the marquis was saying to her,

as though she were one of those theatrical ladies! And so at last she assumed a highly respectable expression and jerked out this phrase:

"My husband's coming! You'll see."

Meanwhile the worn-looking artistes were dropping off one after the other in their outdoor coats. Groups of men and women were coming down the little winding staircase, and the outlines of battered hats and worn-out shawls were visible in the shadows. They looked colorless and unlovely, as became poor play actors who have got rid of their paint. On the stage, where the side lights and battens were being extinguished, the prince was listening to an anecdote Bordenave was telling him. He was waiting for Nana, and when at length she made her appearance the stage was dark, and the fireman on duty was finishing his round, lantern in hand. Bordenave, in order to save His Highness going about by the Passage des Panoramas, had made them open the corridor which led from the porter's lodge to the entrance hall of the theater. Along this narrow alley little women were racing pell-mell, for they were delighted to escape from the men who were waiting for them in the other passage. They went jostling and elbowing along, casting apprehensive glances behind them and only breathing freely when they got outside. Fontan, Bosc and Prullière, on the other hand, retired at a leisurely pace, joking at the figure cut by the serious, paying admirers who were striding up and down the Galerie des Variétés at a time when the little dears were escaping along the boulevard with the men of their hearts. But Clarisse was especially sly. She had her suspicions about La Faloise, and, as a matter of fact, he was still in his place in the lodge among the gentlemen obstinately waiting on Mme Bron's chairs. They all stretched forward, and with that she passed brazenly by in the wake of a friend. The gentlemen were blinking in bewilderment over the wild whirl of petticoats eddying at the foot of the narrow stairs. It made them desperate to think they had waited so long, only to see them all flying away like this without being able to recognize a single one. The litter of little black cats were sleeping on the oilcloth, nestled against their mother's belly, and the latter was stretching her paws out in a state of beatitude while the big tortoiseshell cat sat at the other end of the table, her tail stretched out behind her and her yellow eyes solemnly following the flight of the women.

"If His Highness will be good enough to come this way," said Bordenave at the bottom of the stairs, and he pointed to the passage.

Some chorus girls were still crowding along it. The prince began following Nana while Muffat and the marquis walked behind.

It was a long, narrow passage lying between the theater and the house next door, a kind of contracted by-lane which had been covered with a sloping glass roof. Damp oozed from the walls, and the footfall sounded as hollow on the tiled floor as in an underground vault. It was crowded with the kind of rubbish usually found in a garret. There was a workbench on which the porter was wont to plane such parts of the scenery as required it, besides a pile of wooden barriers which at night were placed at the doors of the theater for the purpose of regulating the incoming stream of people. Nana had to pick up her dress as she passed a hydrant which, through having been carelessly

turned off, was flooding the tiles underfoot. In the entrance hall the company bowed and said good-by. And when Bordenave was alone he summed up his opinion of the prince in a shrug of eminently philosophic disdain.

"He's a bit of a duffer all the same," he said to Fauchery without entering on further explanations, and with that Rose Mignon carried the journalist off with her husband in order to effect a reconciliation between them at home.

Muffat was left alone on the sidewalk. His Highness had handed Nana quietly into his carriage, and the marquis had slipped off after Satin and her super. In his excitement he was content to follow this vicious pair in vague hopes of some stray favor being granted him. Then with brain on fire Muffat decided to walk home. The struggle within him had wholly ceased. The ideas and beliefs of the last forty years were being drowned in a flood of new life. While he was passing along the boulevards the roll of the last carriages deafened him with the name of Nana; the gaslights set nude limbs dancing before his eyes—the nude limbs, the lithe arms, the white shoulders, of Nana. And he felt that he was hers utterly: he would have abjured everything, sold everything, to possess her for a single hour that very night. Youth, a lustful puberty of early manhood, was stirring within him at last, flaming up suddenly in the chaste heart of the Catholic and amid the dignified traditions of middle age.

CHAPTER VI

COUNT MUFFAT, accompanied by his wife and daughter, had arrived overnight at Les Fondettes, where Mme Hugon, who was staying there with only her son Georges, had invited them to come and spend a week. The house, which had been built at the end of the eighteenth century, stood in the middle of a huge square enclosure. It was perfectly unadorned, but the garden possessed magnificent shady trees and a chain of tanks fed by running spring water. It stood at the side of the road which leads from Orleans to Paris and with its rich verdure and high-embowered trees broke the monotony of that flat countryside, where fields stretched to the horizon's verge.

At eleven o'clock, when the second lunch bell had called the whole household together, Mme Hugon, smiling in her kindly maternal way, gave Sabine two great kisses, one on each cheek, and said as she did so:

"You know it's my custom in the country. Oh, seeing you here makes me feel twenty years younger. Did you sleep well in your old room?"

Then without waiting for her reply she turned to Estelle:

"And this little one, has she had a nap too? Give me a kiss, my child."

They had taken their seats in the vast dining room, the windows of which looked out on the park. But they only occupied one end of the long table, where they sat somewhat crowded together for company's sake. Sabine, in high good spirits, dwelt on various childish memories which had been stirred up within her—memories of months passed at Les Fondettes, of long walks, of a tumble into one of the tanks on a summer evening, of an old romance of

chivalry discovered by her on the top of a cupboard and read during the winter before fires made of vine branches. And Georges, who had not seen the countess for some months, thought there was something curious about her. Her face seemed changed, somehow, while, on the other hand, that stick of an Estelle seemed more insignificant and dumb and awkward than ever.

While such simple fare as cutlets and boiled eggs was being discussed by the company, Mme Hugon, as became a good housekeeper, launched out into complaints. The butchers, she said, were becoming impossible. She bought everything at Orleans, and yet they never brought her the pieces she asked for. Yet, alas, if her guests had nothing worth eating it was their own fault: they had come too late in the season.

"There's no sense in it," she said. "I've been expecting you since June, and now we're half through September. You see, it doesn't look pretty."

And with a movement she pointed to the trees on the grass outside, the leaves of which were beginning to turn yellow. The day was covered, and the distance was hidden by a bluish haze which was fraught with a sweet and melancholy peacefulness.

"Oh, I'm expecting company," she continued. "We shall be gayer then! The first to come will be two gentlemen whom Georges has invited—Monsieur Fauchery and Monsieur Daguenet; you know them, do you not? Then we shall have Monsieur de Vandevres, who has promised me a visit these five years past. This time, perhaps, he'll make up his mind!"

"Oh, well and good!" said the countess, laughing. "If we only can get Monsieur de Vandevres! But he's too much engaged."

"And Philippe?" queried Muffat.

"Philippe has asked for a furlough," replied the old lady, "but without doubt you won't be at Les Fondettes any longer when he arrives."

The coffee was served. Paris was now the subject of conversation, and Steiner's name was mentioned, at which Mme Hugon gave a little cry.

"Let me see," she said; "Monsieur Steiner is that stout man I met at your house one evening. He's a banker, is he not? Now there's a detestable man for you! Why, he's gone and bought an actress an estate about a league from here, over Gumières way, beyond the Choue. The whole countryside's scandalized. Did you know about that, my friend?"

"I knew nothing about it," replied Muffat. "Ah, then, Steiner's bought a country place in the neighborhood!"

Hearing his mother broach the subject, Georges looked into his coffee cup, but in his astonishment at the count's answer he glanced up at him and stared. Why was he lying so glibly? The count, on his side, noticed the young fellow's movement and gave him a suspicious glance. Mme Hugon continued to go into details: the country place was called La Mignotte. In order to get there one had to go up the bank of the Choue as far as Gumières in order to cross the bridge; otherwise one got one's feet wet and ran the risk of a ducking.

"And what is the actress's name?" asked the countess.

"Oh, I wasn't told," murmured the old lady. "Georges, you were there the morning the gardener spoke to us about it."

Georges appeared to rack his brains. Muffat waited, twirling a teaspoon between his fingers. Then the countess addressed her husband:

"Isn't Monsieur Steiner with that singer at the Variétés, that Nana?"

"Nana, that's the name! A horrible woman!" cried Mme Hugon with growing annoyance. "And they are expecting her at La Mignotte. I've heard all about it from the gardener. Didn't the gardener say they were expecting her this evening, Georges?"

The count gave a little start of astonishment, but Georges replied with much vivacity:

"Oh, Mother, the gardener spoke without knowing anything about it. Directly afterward the coachman said just the opposite. Nobody's expected at La Mignotte before the day after tomorrow."

He tried hard to assume a natural expression while he slyly watched the effect of his remarks on the count. The latter was twirling his spoon again as though reassured. The countess, her eyes fixed dreamily on the blue distances of the park, seemed to have lost all interest in the conversation. The shadow of a smile on her lips, she seemed to be following up a secret thought which had been suddenly awakened within her. Estelle, on the other hand, sitting stiffly on her chair, had heard all that had been said about Nana, but her white, virginal face had not betrayed a trace of emotion.

"Dear me, dear me! I've got no right to grow angry," murmured Mme Hugon after a pause, and with a return to her old good humor she added: "Everybody's got a right to live. If we meet this said lady on the road we shall not bow to her—that's all!"

And as they got up from table she once more gently upbraided the Countess Sabine for having been so long in coming to her that year. But the countess defended herself and threw the blame of the delays upon her husband's shoulders. Twice on the eve of departure, when all the trunks were locked, he counterordered their journey on the plea of urgent business. Then he had suddenly decided to start just when the trip seemed shelved. Thereupon the old lady told them how Georges in the same way had twice announced his arrival without arriving and had finally cropped up at Les Fondettes the day before yesterday, when she was no longer expecting him. They had come down into the garden, and the two men, walking beside the ladies, were listening to them in consequential silence.

"Never mind," said Mme Hugon, kissing her son's sunny locks. "Zizi is a very good boy to come and bury himself in the country with his mother. He's a dear Zizi not to forget me!"

In the afternoon she expressed some anxiety, for Georges, directly after leaving the table, had complained of a heavy feeling in his head and now seemed in for an atrocious sick headache. Toward four o'clock he said he would go upstairs to bed: it was the only remedy. After sleeping till tomorrow morning he would be perfectly himself again. His mother was bent on putting him to bed herself, but as she left the room he ran and locked the door, explaining that he was shutting himself in so that no one should come and disturb him. Then caressingly he shouted, "Good night till tomorrow,"

little Mother!" and promised to take a nap. But he did not go to bed again and with flushed cheeks and bright eyes noiselessly put on his clothes. Then he sat on a chair and waited. When the dinner bell rang he listened for Count Muffat, who was on his way to the dining room, and ten minutes later, when he was certain that no one would see him, he slipped from the window to the ground with the assistance of a rain pipe. His bedroom was situated on the first floor and looked out upon the rear of the house. He threw himself among some bushes and got out of the park and then galloped across the fields with empty stomach and heart beating with excitement. Night was closing in, and a small fine rain was beginning to fall.

It was the very evening that Nana was due at La Mignotte. Ever since in the preceding May Steiner had bought her this country place she had from time to time been so filled with the desire of taking possession that she had wept hot tears about, but on each of these occasions Bordenave had refused to give her even the shortest leave and had deferred her holiday till September on the plea that he did not intend putting an understudy in her place, even for one evening, now that the exhibition was on. Toward the close of August he spoke of October. Nana was furious and declared that she would be at La Mignotte in the middle of September. Nay, in order to dare Bordenave, she even invited a crowd of guests in his very presence. One afternoon in her rooms, as Muffat, whose advances she still adroitly resisted, was beseeching her with tremulous emotion to yield to his entreaties, she at length promised to be kind, but not in Paris, and to him, too, she named the middle of September. Then on the twelfth she was seized by a desire to be off forthwith with Zoé as her sole companion. It might be that Bordenave had got wind of her intentions and was about to discover some means of detaining her. She was delighted at the notion of putting him in a fix, and she sent him a doctor's certificate. When once the idea had entered her head of being the first to get to La Mignotte and of living there two days without anybody knowing anything about it, she rushed Zoé through the operation of packing and finally pushed her into a cab, where in a sudden burst of extreme contrition she kissed her and begged her pardon. It was only when they got to the station refreshment room that she thought of writing Steiner of her movements. She begged him to wait till the day after tomorrow before re-joining her if he wanted to find her quite bright and fresh. And then, suddenly conceiving another project, she wrote a second letter, in which she besought her aunt to bring little Louis to her at once. It would do Baby so much good! And how happy they would be together in the shade of the trees! In the railway carriage between Paris and Orleans she spoke of nothing else; her eyes were full of tears; she had an unexpected attack of maternal tenderness and mingled together flowers, birds and child in her every sentence.

La Mignotte was more than three leagues away from the station, and Nana lost a good hour over the hire of a carriage, a huge, dilapidated calash, which rumbled slowly along to an accompaniment of rattling old iron. She had at once taken possession of the coachman, a little taciturn old man whom she overwhelmed with questions. Had he often passed by La Mignotte? It was

behind this hill then? There ought to be lots of trees there, eh? And the house, could one see it at a distance? The little old man answered with a succession of grunts. Down in the calash Nana was almost dancing with impatience, while Zoé, in her annoyance at having left Paris in such a hurry, sat stiffly sulking beside her. The horse suddenly stopped short, and the young woman thought they had reached their destination. She put her head out of the carriage door and asked:

"Are we there, eh?"

By way of answer the driver whipped up his horse, which was in the act of painfully climbing a hill. Nana gazed ecstatically at the vast plain beneath the gray sky where great clouds were banked up.

"Oh, do look, Zoé! There's greenery! Now, is that all wheat? Good lord, how pretty it is!"

"One can quite see that Madame doesn't come from the country," was the servant's prim and tardy rejoinder. "As for me, I knew the country only too well when I was with my dentist. He had a house at Bougival. No, it's cold, too, this evening. It's damp in these parts."

They were driving under the shadow of a wood, and Nana sniffed up the scent of the leaves as a young dog might. All of a sudden at a turn of the road she caught sight of the corner of a house among the trees. Perhaps it was there! And with that she began a conversation with the driver, who continued shaking his head by way of saying no. Then as they drove down the other side of the hill he contented himself by holding out his whip and muttering, "'Tis down there."

She got up and stretched herself almost bodily out of the carriage door.

"Where is it? Where is it?" she cried with pale cheeks, but as yet she saw nothing.

At last she caught sight of a bit of wall. And then followed a succession of little cries and jumps, the ecstatic behavior of a woman overcome by a new and vivid sensation.

"I see it! I see it, Zoé! Look out at the other side. Oh, there's a terrace with brick ornaments on the roof! And there's a hothouse down there! But the place is immense. Oh, how happy I am! Do look, Zoé! Now, do look!"

The carriage had by this time pulled up before the park gates. A side door was opened, and the gardener, a tall, dry fellow, made his appearance, cap in hand. Nana made an effort to regain her dignity, for the driver seemed now to be suppressing a laugh behind his dry, speechless lips. She refrained from setting off at a run and listened to the gardener, who was a very talkative fellow. He begged Madame to excuse the disorder in which she found everything, seeing that he had only received Madame's letter that very morning. But despite all his efforts, she flew off at a tangent and walked so quickly that Zoé could scarcely follow her. At the end of the avenue she paused for a moment in order to take the house in at a glance. It was a great pavilionlike building in the Italian manner, and it was flanked by a smaller construction, which a rich Englishman, after two years' residence in Naples, had caused to be erected and had forthwith become disgusted with.

"I'll take Madame over the house," said the gardener.

But she had outrun him entirely, and she shouted back that he was not to put himself out and that she would go over the house by herself. She preferred doing that, she said. And without removing her hat she dashed into the different rooms, calling to Zoé as she did so, shouting her impressions from one end of each corridor to the other and filling the empty house, which for long months had been uninhabited, with exclamations and bursts of laughter. In the first place, there was the hall. It was a little damp, but that didn't matter; one wasn't going to sleep in it. Then came the drawing room, quite the thing, the drawing room, with its windows opening on the lawn. Only the red upholsteries there were hideous; she would alter all that. As to the dining room—well, it was a lovely dining room, eh? What big blowouts you might give in Paris if you had a dining room as large as that! As she was going upstairs to the first floor it occurred to her that she had not seen the kitchen, and she went down again and indulged in ecstatic exclamations. Zoé ought to admire the beautiful dimensions of the sink and the width of the hearth, where you might have roasted a sheep! When she had gone upstairs again her bedroom especially enchanted her. It had been hung with delicate rose-colored Louis XVI cretonne by an Orleans upholsterer. Dear me, yes! One ought to sleep jolly sound in such a room as that; why, it was a real best bedroom! Then came four or five guest chambers and then some splendid garrets, which would be extremely convenient for trunks and boxes. Zoé looked very gruff and cast a frigid glance into each of the rooms as she lingered in Madame's wake. She saw Nana disappearing up the steep garret ladder and said, "Thanks, I haven't the least wish to break my legs." But the sound of a voice reached her from far away; indeed, it seemed to come whistling down a chimney.

"Zoé, Zoé, where are you? Come up, do! You've no idea! It's like fairyland!"

Zoé went up, grumbling. On the roof she found her mistress leaning against the brickwork balustrade and gazing at the valley which spread out into the silence. The horizon was immeasurably wide, but it was now covered by masses of gray vapor, and a fierce wind was driving fine rain before it. Nana had to hold her hat on with both hands to keep it from being blown away while her petticoats streamed out behind her, flapping like a flag.

"Not if I know it!" said Zoé, drawing her head in at once. "Madame will be blown away. What beastly weather!"

Madame did not hear what she said. With her head over the balustrade she was gazing at the grounds beneath. They consisted of seven or eight acres of land enclosed within a wall. Then the view of the kitchen garden entirely engrossed her attention. She darted back, jostling the lady's maid at the top of the stairs and bursting out:

"It's full of cabbages! Oh, such woppers! And lettuces and sorrel and onions and everything! Come along, make haste!"

The rain was falling more heavily now, and she opened her white silk sunshade and ran down the garden walks.

"Madame will catch cold," cried Zoé, who had stayed quietly behind under the awning over the garden door.

But Madame wanted to see things, and at each new discovery there was a burst of wonderment.

"Zoé, here's spinach! Do come. Oh, look at the artichokes! They are funny. So they grow in the ground, do they? Now, what can that be? I don't know it. Do come, Zoé, perhaps you know."

The lady's maid never budged an inch. Madame must really be raving mad. For now the rain was coming down in torrents, and the little white silk sunshade was already dark with it. Nor did it shelter Madame, whose skirts were wringing wet. But that didn't put her out in the smallest degree, and in the pouring rain she visited the kitchen garden and the orchard, stopping in front of every fruit tree and bending over every bed of vegetables. Then she ran and looked down the well and lifted up a frame to see what was underneath it and was lost in the contemplation of a huge pumpkin. She wanted to go along every single garden walk and to take immediate possession of all the things she had been wont to dream of in the old days, when she was a slipshod work-girl on the Paris pavements. The rain redoubled, but she never heeded it and was only miserable at the thought that the daylight was fading. She could not see clearly now and touched things with her fingers to find out what they were. Suddenly in the twilight she caught sight of a bed of strawberries, and all that was childish in her awoke.

"Strawberries! Strawberries! There are some here; I can feel them. A plate, Zoé! Come and pick strawberries."

And dropping her sunshade, Nana crouched down in the mire under the full force of the downpour. With drenched hands she began gathering the fruit among the leaves. But Zoé in the meantime brought no plate, and when the young woman rose to her feet again she was frightened. She thought she had seen a shadow close to her.

"It's some beast!" she screamed.

But she stood rooted to the path in utter amazement. It was a man, and she recognized him.

"Gracious me, it's Baby! What *are* you doing there, baby?"

"'Gad, I've come—that's all!" replied Georges.

Her head swam.

"You knew I'd come through the gardener telling you? Oh, that poor child! Why, he's soaking!"

"Oh, I'll explain that to you! The rain caught me on my way here, and then, as I didn't wish to go upstream as far as Gumières, I crossed the Choue and fell into a blessed hole."

Nana forgot the strawberries forthwith. She was trembling and full of pity. That poor dear Zizi in a hole full of water! And she drew him with her in the direction of the house and spoke of making up a roaring fire.

"You know," he murmured, stopping her among the shadows, "I was in hiding because I was afraid of being scolded, like in Paris, when I come and see you and you're not expecting me."

She made no reply but burst out laughing and gave him a kiss on the forehead. Up till today she had always treated him like a naughty urchin, never taking his declarations seriously and amusing herself at his expense as though he were a little man of no consequence whatever. There was much ado to install him in the house. She absolutely insisted on the fire being lit in her bedroom, as being the most comfortable place for his reception. Georges had not surprised Zoé, who was used to all kinds of encounters, but the gardener, who brought the wood upstairs, was greatly nonplused at sight of this dripping gentleman to whom he was certain he had not opened the front door. He was, however, dismissed, as he was no longer wanted.

A lamp lit up the room, and the fire burned with a great bright flame.

"He'll never get dry, and he'll catch cold," said Nana, seeing Georges beginning to shiver.

And there were no men's trousers in her house! She was on the point of calling the gardener back when an idea struck her. Zoé, who was unpacking the trunks in the dressing room, brought her mistress a change of underwear, consisting of a shift and some petticoats with a dressing jacket.

"Oh, that's first rate!" cried the young woman. "Zizi can put 'em all on. You're not angry with me, eh? When your clothes are dry you can put them on again, and then off with you, as fast as fast can be, so as not to have a scolding from your mamma. Make haste! I'm going to change my things, too, in the dressing room."

Ten minutes afterward, when she reappeared in a tea gown, she clasped her hands in a perfect ecstasy.

"Oh, the darling! How sweet he looks dressed like a little woman!"

He had simply slipped on a long nightgown with an insertion front, a pair of worked drawers and the dressing jacket, which was a long cambric garment trimmed with lace. Thus attired and with his delicate young arms showing and his bright damp hair falling almost to his shoulders, he looked just like a girl.

"Why, he's as slim as I am!" said Nana, putting her arm round his waist. "Zoé, just come here and see how it suits him. It's made for him, eh? All except the bodice part, which is too large. He hasn't got as much as I have, poor, dear Zizi!"

"Oh, to be sure, I'm a bit wanting there," murmured Georges with a smile.

All three grew very merry about it. Nana had set to work buttoning the dressing jacket from top to bottom so as to make him quite decent. Then she turned him round as though he were a doll, gave him little thumps, made the skirt stand well out behind. After which she asked him questions. Was he comfortable? Did he feel warm? Zounds, yes, he was comfortable! Nothing fitted more closely and warmly than a woman's shift; had he been able, he would always have worn one. He moved round and about therein, delighted with the fine linen and the soft touch of that unmanly garment, in the folds of which he thought he discovered some of Nana's own warm life.

Meanwhile Zoé had taken the soaked clothes down to the kitchen in order to dry them as quickly as possible in front of a vine-branch fire. Then Georges, as he lounged in an easy chair, ventured to make a confession.

"I say, are you going to feed this evening? I'm dying of hunger. I haven't dined."

Nana was vexed. The great silly thing to go sloping off from Mamma's with an empty stomach, just to chuck himself into a hole full of water! But she was as hungry as a hunter too. They certainly must feed! Only they would have to eat what they could get. Whereupon a round table was rolled up in front of the fire, and the queerest of dinners was improvised thereon. Zoé ran down to the gardener's, he having cooked a mess of cabbage soup in case Madame should not dine at Orleans before her arrival. Madame, indeed, had forgotten to tell him what he was to get ready in the letter she had sent him. Fortunately the cellar was well furnished. Accordingly they had cabbage soup, followed by a piece of bacon. Then Nana rummaged in her handbag and found quite a heap of provisions which she had taken the precaution of stuffing into it. There was a Strasbourg pâté, for instance, and a bag of sweetmeats and some oranges. So they both ate away like ogres and, while they satisfied their healthy young appetites, treated one another with easy good fellowship. Nana kept calling Georges "dear old girl," a form of address which struck her as at once tender and familiar. At dessert, in order not to give Zoé any more trouble, they used the same spoon turn and turn about while demolishing a pot of preserves they had discovered at the top of a cupboard.

"Oh, you dear old girl!" said Nana, pushing back the round table. "I haven't made such a good dinner these ten years past!"

Yet it was growing late, and she wanted to send her boy off for fear he should be suspected of all sorts of things. But he kept declaring that he had plenty of time to spare. For the matter of that, his clothes were not drying well, and Zoé averred that it would take an hour longer at least, and as she was dropping with sleep after the fatigues of the journey, they sent her off to bed. After which they were alone in the silent house.

It was a very charming evening. The fire was dying out amid glowing embers, and in the great blue room, where Zoé had made up the bed before going upstairs, the air felt a little oppressive. Nana, overcome by the heavy warmth, got up to open the window for a few minutes, and as she did so she uttered a little cry.

"Great heavens, how beautiful it is! Look, dear old girl!"

Georges had come up, and as though the window bar had not been sufficiently wide, he put his arm round Nana's waist and rested his head against her shoulder. The weather had undergone a brisk change: the skies were clearing, and a full moon lit up the country with its golden disk of light. A sovereign quiet reigned over the valley. It seemed wider and larger as it opened on the immense distances of the plain, where the trees loomed like little shadowy islands amid a shining and waveless lake. And Nana grew tenderhearted, felt herself a child again. Most surely she had dreamed of nights like this at an epoch which she could not recall. Since leaving the train every object of sensation—the wide countryside, the green things with their pungent scents, the house, the vegetables—had stirred her to such a degree that now it seemed to her as if she had left Paris twenty years ago. Yesterday's

existence was far, far away, and she was full of sensations of which she had no previous experience. Georges, meanwhile, was giving her neck little coaxing kisses, and this again added to her sweet unrest. With hesitating hand she pushed him from her, as though he were a child whose affectionate advances were fatiguing, and once more she told him that he ought to take his departure. He did not gainsay her. All in good time—he would go all in good time!

But a bird raised its song and again was silent. It was a robin in an elder tree below the window.

"Wait one moment," whispered Georges; "the lamp's frightening him. I'll put it out."

And when he came back and took her waist again he added:

"We'll relight it in a minute."

Then as she listened to the robin and the boy pressed against her side, Nana remembered. Ah yes, it was in novels that she had got to know all this! In other days she would have given her heart to have a full moon and robins and a lad dying of love for her. Great God, she could have cried, so good and charming did it all seem to her! Beyond a doubt she had been born to live honestly! So she pushed Georges away again, and he grew yet bolder.

"No, let me be. I don't care about it. It would be very wicked at your age. Now listen—I'll always be your mamma."

A sudden feeling of shame overcame her. She was blushing exceedingly, and yet not a soul could see her. The room behind them was full of black night while the country stretched before them in silence and lifeless solitude. Never had she known such a sense of shame before. Little by little she felt her power of resistance ebbing away, and that despite her embarrassed efforts to the contrary. That disguise of his, that woman's shift and that dressing jacket set her laughing again. It was as though a girl friend were teasing her.

"Oh, it's not right; it's not right!" she stammered after a last effort.

And with that, in face of the lovely night, she sank like a young virgin into the arms of this mere child. The house slept.

Next morning at Les Fondettes, when the bell rang for lunch, the dining-room table was no longer too big for the company. Fauchery and Daguenet had been driven up together in one carriage, and after them another had arrived with the Count de Vandevres, who had followed by the next train. Georges was the last to come downstairs. He was looking a little pale, and his eyes were sunken, but in answer to questions he said that he was much better, though he was still somewhat shaken by the violence of the attack. Mme Hugon looked into his eyes with an anxious smile and adjusted his hair which had been carelessly combed that morning, but he drew back as though embarrassed by this tender little action. During the meal she chaffed Vandevres very pleasantly and declared that she had expected him for five years *past*.

"Well, here you are at last! How have you managed it?"

Vandevres took her remarks with equal pleasantry. He told her that he had lost a fabulous sum of money at the club yesterday and thereupon had come away with the intention of ending up in the country.

"'Pon my word, yes, if only you can find me an heiress in these rustic parts! There must be delightful women hereabouts."

The old lady rendered equal thanks to Daguenet and Fauchery for having been so good as to accept her son's invitation, and then to her great and joyful surprise she saw the Marquis de Chouard enter the room. A third carriage had brought him.

"Dear me, you've made this your trysting place today!" she cried. "You've passed word round! But what's happening? For years I've never succeeded in bringing you all together, and now you all drop in at once. Oh, I certainly don't complain."

Another place was laid. Fauchery found himself next the Countess Sabine, whose liveliness and gaiety surprised him when he remembered her drooping, languid state in the austere Rue Miromesnil drawing room. Daguenet, on the other hand, who was seated on Estelle's left, seemed slightly put out by his propinquity to that tall, silent girl. The angularity of her elbows was disagreeable to him. Muffat and Chouard had exchanged a sly glance while Vandevres continued joking about his coming marriage.

"Talking of ladies," Mme Hugon ended by saying, "I have a new neighbor whom you probably know."

And she mentioned Nana. Vandevres affected the liveliest astonishment.

"Well, that is strange! Nana's property near here!"

Fauchery and Daguenet indulged in a similar demonstration while the Marquis de Chouard discussed the breast of a chicken without appearing to comprehend their meaning. Not one of the men had smiled.

"Certainly," continued the old lady, "and the person in question arrived at La Mignotte yesterday evening, as I was saying she would. I got my information from the gardener this morning."

At these words the gentlemen could not conceal their very real surprise. They all looked up. Eh? What? Nana had come down! But they were only expecting her next day; they were privately under the impression that they would arrive before her! Georges alone sat looking at his glass with drooped eyelids and a tired expression. Ever since the beginning of lunch he had seemed to be sleeping with open eyes and a vague smile on his lips.

"Are you still in pain, my Zizi?" asked his mother, who had been gazing at him throughout the meal.

He started and blushed as he said that he was very well now, but the worn-out insatiate expression of a girl who has danced too much did not fade from his face.

"What's the matter with your neck?" resumed Mme Hugon in an alarmed tone. "It's all red."

He was embarrassed and stammered. He did not know—he had nothing the matter with his neck. Then drawing his shirt collar up:

"Ah yes, some insect stung me there!"

The Marquis de Chouard had cast a sidelong glance at the little red place. Muffat, too, looked at Georges. The company was finishing lunch and planning various excursions. Fauchery was growing increasingly excited with the

Countess Sabine's laughter. As he was passing her a dish of fruit their hands touched, and for one second she looked at him with eyes so full of dark meaning that he once more thought of the secret which had been communicated to him one evening after an uproarious dinner. Then, too, she was no longer the same woman. Something was more pronounced than of old, and her gray foulard gown which fitted loosely over her shoulders added a touch of license to her delicate, high-strung elegance.

When they rose from the table Daguenet remained behind with Fauchery in order to impart to him the following crude witticism about Estelle: "A nice broomstick that to shove into a man's hands!" Nevertheless, he grew serious when the journalist told him the amount she was worth in the way of dowry.

"Four hundred thousand francs."

"And the mother?" queried Fauchery. "She's all right, eh?"

"Oh, *she'll* work the oracle! But it's no go, my dear man!"

"Bah! How are we to know? We must wait and see."

It was impossible to go out that day, for the rain was still falling in heavy showers. Georges had made haste to disappear from the scene and had double-locked his door. These gentlemen avoided mutual explanations, though they were none of them deceived as to the reasons which had brought them together. Vandeuvres, who had had a very bad time at play, had really conceived the notion of lying fallow for a season, and he was counting on Nana's presence in the neighborhood as a safeguard against excessive boredom. Fauchery had taken advantage of the holidays granted him by Rose, who just then was extremely busy. He was thinking of discussing a second notice with Nana, in case country air should render them reciprocally affectionate. Daguenet, who had been just a little sulky with her since Steiner had come upon the scene, was dreaming of resuming the old connection or at least of snatching some delightful opportunities if occasion offered. As to the Marquis de Chouard, he was watching for times and seasons. But among all those men who were busy following in the tracks of Venus—a Venus with the rouge scarce washed from her cheeks—Muffat was at once the most ardent and the most tortured by the novel sensations of desire and fear and anger warring in his anguished members. A formal promise had been made him; Nana was awaiting him. Why then had she taken her departure two days sooner than was expected?

He resolved to betake himself to La Mignotte after dinner that same evening.

At night as the count was leaving the park Georges fled forth after him. He left him to follow the road to Gumières, crossed the Choue, rushed into Nana's presence, breathless, furious and with tears in his eyes. Ah yes, he understood everything! That old fellow now on his way to her was coming to keep an appointment! Nana was dumfounded by this ebullition of jealousy, and, greatly moved by the way things were turning out, she took him in her arms and comforted him to the best of her ability. Oh no, he was quite beside the mark; she was expecting no one. If the gentleman came it would not be her fault. What a great ninny that Zizi was to be taking on so about nothing

at all! By her child's soul she swore she loved nobody except her own Georges. And with that she kissed him and wiped away his tears.

"Now just listen! You'll see that it's all for your sake," she went on when he had grown somewhat calmer. "Steiner has arrived—he's up above there now. You know, duckie, I can't turn *him* out of doors."

"Yes, I know; I'm not talking of *him*," whispered the boy.

"Very well then, I've stuck him into the room at the end. I said I was out of sorts. He's unpacking his trunk. Since nobody's seen you, be quick and run up and hide in my room and wait for me."

Georges sprang at her and threw his arms round her neck. It was true after all! She loved him a little! So they would put the lamp out as they did yesterday and be in the dark till daytime! Then as the front-door bell sounded he quietly slipped away. Upstairs in the bedroom he at once took off his shoes so as not to make any noise and straightway crouched down behind a curtain and waited soberly.

Nana welcomed Count Muffat, who, though still shaken with passion, was now somewhat embarrassed. She had pledged her word to him and would even have liked to keep it since he struck her as a serious, practicable lover. But truly, who could have foreseen all that happened yesterday? There was the voyage and the house she had never set eyes on before and the arrival of the drenched little lover! How sweet it had all seemed to her, and how delightful it would be to continue in it! So much the worse for the gentleman! For three months past she had been keeping him dangling after her while she affected conventionality in order the further to inflame him. Well, well! He would have to continue dangling, and if he didn't like that he could go! She would sooner have thrown up everything than have played false to Georges.

The count had seated himself with all the ceremonious politeness becoming a country caller. Only his hands were trembling slightly. Lust, which Nana's skillful tactics daily exasperated, had at last wrought terrible havoc in that sanguine, uncontaminated nature. The grave man, the chamberlain who was wont to tread the state apartments at the Tuileries with slow and dignified step, was now nightly driven to plunge his teeth into his bolster, while with sobs of exasperation he pictured to himself a sensual shape which never changed. But this time he was determined to make an end of the torture. Coming along the highroad in the deep quiet of the gloaming, he had meditated a fierce course of action. And the moment he had finished his opening remarks he tried to take hold of Nana with both hands.

"No, no! Take care!" she said simply. She was not vexed; nay, she even smiled.

He caught her again, clenching his teeth as he did so. Then as she struggled to get free he coarsely and crudely reminded her that he had come to stay the night. Though much embarrassed at this, Nana did not cease to smile. She took his hands and spoke very familiarly in order to soften her refusal.

"Come now, darling, do be quiet! Honor bright, I can't: Steiner's upstairs."

But he was beside himself. Never yet had she seen a man in such a state. She grew frightened and put her hand over his mouth in order to stifle his

cries. Then in lowered tones she besought him to be quiet and to let her alone. Steiner was coming downstairs. Things were getting stupid, to be sure! When Steiner entered the room he heard Nana remarking:

"I adore the country."

She was lounging comfortably back in her deep easy chair, and she turned round and interrupted herself.

"It's Monsieur le Comte Muffat, darling. He saw a light here while he was strolling past, and he came in to bid us welcome."

The two men clasped hands. Muffat, with his face in shadow, stood silent for a moment or two. Steiner seemed sulky. Then they chatted about Paris: business there was at a standstill; abominable things had been happening on 'change. When a quarter of an hour had elapsed Muffat took his departure, and, as the young woman was seeing him to the door, he tried without success to make an assignation for the following night. Steiner went up to bed almost directly afterward, grumbling, as he did so, at the everlasting little ailments that seemed to afflict the genus courtesan. The two old boys had been packed off at last! When she was able to rejoin him Nana found Georges still hiding exemplarily behind the curtain. The room was dark. He pulled her down onto the floor as she sat near him, and together they began playfully rolling on the ground, stopping now and again and smothering their laughter with kisses whenever they struck their bare feet against some piece of furniture. Far away, on the road to Gumières, Count Muffat walked slowly home and, hat in hand, bathed his burning forehead in the freshness and silence of the night.

During the days that followed Nana found life adorable. In the lad's arms she was once more a girl of fifteen, and under the caressing influence of this renewed childhood love's white flower once more blossomed forth in a nature which had grown hackneyed and disgusted in the service of the other sex. She would experience sudden fits of shame, sudden vivid emotions, which left her trembling. She wanted to laugh and to cry, and she was beset by nervous, maidenly feelings, mingled with warm desires that made her blush again. Never yet had she felt anything comparable to this. The country filled her with tender thoughts. As a little girl she had long wished to dwell in a meadow, tending a goat, because one day on the talus of the fortifications she had seen a goat bleating at the end of its tether. Now this estate, this stretch of land belonging to her, simply swelled her heart to bursting, so utterly had her old ambition been surpassed. Once again she tasted the novel sensations experienced by chits of girls, and at night when she went upstairs, dizzy with her day in the open air and intoxicated by the scent of green leaves, and rejoined her Zizi behind the curtain, she fancied herself a schoolgirl enjoying a holiday escapade. It was an amour, she thought, with a young cousin to whom she was going to be married. And so she trembled at the slightest noise and dread lest parents should hear her, while making the delicious experiments and suffering the voluptuous terrors attendant on a girl's first slip from the path of virtue.

Nana in those days was subject to the fancies a sentimental girl will indulge in. She would gaze at the moon for hours. One night she had a mind to go

down into the garden with Georges when all the household was asleep. When there they strolled under the trees, their arms round each other's waists, and finally went and laid down in the grass, where the dew soaked them through and through. On another occasion, after a long silence up in the bedroom, she fell sobbing on the lad's neck, declaring in broken accents that she was afraid of dying. She would often croon a favorite ballad of Mme Lerat's, which was full of flowers and birds. The song would melt her to tears, and she would break off in order to clasp Georges in a passionate embrace and to extract from him vows of undying affection. In short she was extremely silly, as she herself would admit when they both became jolly good fellows again and sat up smoking cigarettes on the edge of the bed, dangling their bare legs over it the while and tapping their heels against its wooden side.

But what utterly melted the young woman's heart was Louiset's arrival. She had an access of maternal affection which was as violent as a mad fit. She would carry off her boy into the sunshine outside to watch him kicking about; she would dress him like a little prince and roll with him in the grass. The moment he arrived she decided that he was to sleep near her, in the room next hers, where Mme Lerat, whom the country greatly affected, used to begin snoring the moment her head touched the pillow. Louiset did not hurt Zizi's position in the least. On the contrary, Nana said that she had now two children, and she treated them with the same wayward tenderness. At night, more than ten times running, she would leave Zizi to go and see if Louiset were breathing properly, but on her return she would re-embrace her Zizi and lavish on him the caresses that had been destined for the child. She played at being Mamma while he wickedly enjoyed being dandled in the arms of the great wench and allowed himself to be rocked to and fro like a baby that is being sent to sleep. It was all so delightful, and Nana was so charmed with her present existence, that she seriously proposed to him never to leave the country. They would send all the other people away, and he, she and the child would live alone. And with that they would make a thousand plans till daybreak and never once hear Mme Lerat as she snored vigorously after the fatigues of a day spent in picking country flowers.

This charming existence lasted nearly a week. Count Muffat used to come every evening and go away again with disordered face and burning hands. One evening he was not even received, as Steiner had been obliged to run up to Paris. He was told that Madame was not well. Nana grew daily more disgusted at the notion of deceiving Georges. He was such an innocent lad, and he had such faith in her! She would have looked on herself as the lowest of the low had she played him false. Besides, it would have sickened her to do so! Zoé, who took her part in this affair in mute disdain, believed that Madame was growing senseless.

On the sixth day a band of visitors suddenly blundered into Nana's idyl. She had, indeed, invited a whole swarm of people under the belief that none of them would come. And so one fine afternoon she was vastly astonished and annoyed to see an omnibus full of people pulling up outside the gate of La Mignotte.

"It's us!" cried Mignon, getting down first from the conveyance and extracting then his sons Henri and Charles.

Labordette thereupon appeared and began handing out an interminable file of ladies—Lucy Stewart, Caroline Héquet, Tatan Néné, Maria Blond. Nana was in hopes that they would end there, when La Faloise sprang from the step in order to receive Gaga and her daughter Amélie in his trembling arms. That brought the number up to eleven people. Their installation proved a laborious undertaking. There were five spare rooms at La Mignotte, one of which was already occupied by Mme Lerat and Louiset. The largest was devoted to the Gaga and La Faloise establishment, and it was decided that Amélie should sleep on a truckle bed in the dressing room at the side. Mignon and his two sons had the third room. Labordette the fourth. There thus remained one room which was transformed into a dormitory with four beds in it for Lucy, Caroline, Tatan and Maria. As to Steiner, he would sleep on the divan in the drawing room. At the end of an hour, when everyone was duly settled, Nana, who had begun by being furious, grew enchanted at the thought of playing hostess on a grand scale. The ladies complimented her on La Mignotte. "It's a stunning property, my dear!" And then, too, they brought her quite a whiff of Parisian air, and talking all together with bursts of laughter and exclamation and emphatic little gestures, they gave her all the petty gossip of the week just past. By the by, and how about Bordenave? What had he said about her prank? Oh, nothing much! After bawling about having her brought back by the police, he had simply put somebody else in her place at night. Little Violaine was the understudy, and she had even obtained a very pretty success as the Blonde Venus. Which piece of news made Nana rather serious.

It was only four o'clock in the afternoon, and there was some talk of taking a stroll around.

"Oh, I haven't told you," said Nana, "I was just off to get up potatoes when you arrived."

Thereupon they all wanted to go and dig potatoes without even changing their dresses first. It was quite a party. The gardener and two helpers were already in the potato field at the end of the grounds. The ladies knelt down and began fumbling in the mold with their be ringed fingers, shouting gaily whenever they discovered a potato of exceptional size. It struck them as so amusing! But Tatan Néné was in a state of triumph! So many were the potatoes she had gathered in her youth that she forgot herself entirely and gave the others much good advice, treating them like geese the while. The gentlemen toiled less strenuously. Mignon looked every inch the good citizen and father and made his stay in the country an occasion for completing his boys' education. Indeed, he spoke to them of Parmentier!

Dinner that evening was wildly hilarious. The company ate ravenously. Nana, in a state of great elevation, had a warm disagreement with her butler, an individual who had been in service at the bishop's palace in Orleans. The ladies smoked over their coffee. An earsplitting noise of merrymaking issued from the open windows and died out far away under the serene evening sky while peasants, belated in the lanes, turned and looked at the flaring rooms.

"It's most tiresome that you're going back the day after tomorrow," said Nana. "But never mind, we'll get up an excursion all the same!"

They decided to go on the morrow, Sunday, and visit the ruins of the old Abbey of Chamont, which were some seven kilometers distant. Five carriages would come out from Orleans, take up the company after lunch and bring them back to dinner at La Mignotte at about seven. It would be delightful.

That evening, as his wont was, Count Muffat mounted the hill to ring at the outer gate. But the brightly lit windows and the shouts of laughter astonished him. When, however, he recognized Mignon's voice, he understood it all and went off, raging at this new obstacle, driven to extremities, bent on some violent act. Georges passed through a little door of which he had the key, slipped along the staircase walls and went quietly up into Nana's room. Only he had to wait for her till past midnight. She appeared at last in a high state of intoxication and more maternal even than on the previous nights. Whenever she had drunk anything she became so amorous as to be absurd. Accordingly she now insisted on his accompanying her to the Abbey of Chamont. But he stood out against this; he was afraid of being seen. If he were to be seen driving with her there would be an atrocious scandal. But she burst into tears and evinced the noisy despair of a slighted woman. And he thereupon consoled her and formally promised to be one of the party.

"So you do love me very much," she blurted out. "Say you love me very much. Oh, my darling old bear, if I were to die would you feel it very much? Confess!"

At Les Fondettes the near neighborhood of Nana had utterly disorganized the party. Every morning during lunch good Mme Hugon returned to the subject despite herself, told her guests the news the gardener had brought her and gave evidence of the absorbing curiosity with which notorious courtesans are able to inspire even the worthiest old ladies. Tolerant though she was, she was revolted and maddened by a vague presentiment of coming ill, which frightened her in the evenings as thoroughly as if a wild beast had escaped from a menagerie and were known to be lurking in the countryside.

She began trying to pick a little quarrel with her guests, whom she each and all accused of prowling round La Mignotte. Count Vandevures had been seen laughing on the highroad with a golden-haired lady, but he defended himself against the accusation; he denied that it was Nana, the fact being that Lucy had been with him and had told him how she had just turned her third prince out of doors. The Marquis de Chouard used also to go out every day, but his excuse was doctor's orders. Toward Daguenet and Fauchery Mme Hugon behaved unjustly too. The former especially never left Les Fondettes, for he had given up the idea of renewing the old connection and was busy paying the most respectful attentions to Estelle. Fauchery also stayed with the Muffat ladies. On one occasion only he had met Mignon with an armful of flowers, putting his sons through a course of botanical instruction in a by-path. The two men had shaken hands and given each other the news about Rose. She was perfectly well and happy; they had both received a letter from her that morning in which she besought them to profit by the fresh country air for some days

longer. Among all her guests the old lady spared only Count Muffat and Georges. The count, who said he had serious business in Orleans, could certainly not be running after the bad woman, and as to Georges, the poor child was at last causing her grave anxiety, seeing that every evening he was seized with atrocious sick headaches which kept him to his bed in broad daylight.

Meanwhile Fauchery had become the Countess Sabine's faithful attendant in the absence during each afternoon of Count Muffat. Whenever they went to the end of the park he carried her campstool and her sunshade. Besides, he amused her with the original witticisms peculiar to a second-rate journalist, and in so doing he prompted her to one of those sudden intimacies which are allowable in the country. She had apparently consented to it from the first, for she had grown quite a girl again in the society of a young man whose noisy humor seemed unlikely to compromise her. But now and again, when for a second or two they found themselves alone behind the shrubs, their eyes would meet; they would pause amid their laughter, grow suddenly serious and view one another darkly, as though they had fathomed and divined their inmost hearts.

On Friday a fresh place had to be laid at lunch time. M. Théophile Venot, whom Mme Hugon remembered to have invited at the Muffats' last winter, had just arrived. He sat stooping humbly forward and behaved with much good nature, as became a man of no account, nor did he seem to notice the anxious deference with which he was treated. When he had succeeded in getting the company to forget his presence he sat nibbling small lumps of sugar during dessert, looking sharply up at Daguenet as the latter handed Estelle strawberries and listening to Fauchery, who was making the countess very merry over one of his anecdotes. Whenever anyone looked at him he smiled in his quiet way. When the guests rose from table he took the count's arm and drew him into the park. He was known to have exercised great influence over the latter ever since the death of his mother. Indeed, singular stories were told about the kind of dominion which the ex-lawyer enjoyed in that household. Fauchery, whom his arrival doubtless embarrassed, began explaining to Georges and Daguenet the origin of the man's wealth. It was a big lawsuit with the management of which the Jesuits had entrusted him in days gone by. In his opinion the worthy man was a terrible fellow despite his gentle, plump face and at this time of day had his finger in all the intrigues of the priesthood. The two young men had begun joking at this, for they thought the little old gentleman had an idiotic expression. The idea of an unknown Venot, a gigantic Venot, acting for the whole body of the clergy, struck them in the light of a comical invention. But they were silenced when, still leaning on the old man's arm, Count Muffat reappeared with blanched cheeks and eyes reddened as if by recent weeping.

"I bet they've been chatting about hell," muttered Fauchery in a bantering tone.

The Countess Sabine overheard the remark. She turned her head slowly, and their eyes met in that long gaze with which they were accustomed to sound one another prudently before venturing once for all.

After the breakfast it was the guests' custom to betake themselves to a little

flower garden on a terrace overlooking the plain. This Sunday afternoon was exquisitely mild. There had been signs of rain toward ten in the morning, but the sky, without ceasing to be covered, had, as it were, melted into milky fog, which now hung like a cloud of luminous dust in the golden sunlight. Soon Mme Hugon proposed that they should step down through a little doorway below the terrace and take a walk on foot in the direction of Gumières and as far as the Choue. She was fond of walking and, considering her threescore years, was very active. Besides, all her guests declared that there was no need to drive. So in a somewhat straggling order they reached the wooden bridge over the river. Fauchery and Dagueneu headed the column with the Muffat ladies and were followed by the count and the marquis, walking on either side of Mme Hugon, while Vandevures, looking fashionable and out of his element on the highroad, marched in the rear, smoking a cigar. M. Venot, now slackening, now hastening his pace, passed smilingly from group to group, as though bent on losing no scrap of conversation.

"To think of poor dear Georges at Orleans!" said Mme Hugon. "He was anxious to consult old Doctor Tavernier, who never goes out now, on the subject of his sick headaches. Yes, you were not up, as he went off before seven o'clock. But it'll be a change for him all the same."

She broke off, exclaiming:

"Why, what's making them stop on the bridge?"

The fact was the ladies and Fauchery and Dagueneu were standing stock-still on the crown of the bridge. They seemed to be hesitating as though some obstacle or other rendered them uneasy and yet the way lay clear before them.

"Go on!" cried the count.

They never moved and seemed to be watching the approach of something which the rest had not yet observed. Indeed the road wound considerably and was bordered by a thick screen of poplar trees. Nevertheless, a dull sound began to grow momentarily louder, and soon there was a noise of wheels, mingled with shouts of laughter and the cracking of whips. Then suddenly five carriages came into view, driving one behind the other. They were crowded to bursting, and bright with a galaxy of white, blue and pink costumes.

"What is it?" said Mme Hugon in some surprise.

Then her instinct told her, and she felt indignant at such an untoward invasion of her road.

"Oh, that woman!" she murmured. "Walk on, pray walk on. Don't appear to notice."

But it was too late. The five carriages which were taking Nana and her circle to the ruins of Chamont rolled on to the narrow wooden bridge. Fauchery, Dagueneu and the Muffat ladies were forced to step backward, while Mme Hugon and the others had also to stop in Indian file along the roadside. It was a superb ride past! The laughter in the carriages had ceased, and faces were turned with an expression of curiosity. The rival parties took stock of each other amid a silence broken only by the measured trot of the horses. In the first carriage Maria Blond and Tatan Néné were lolling backward like a pair of duchesses, their skirts swelling forth over the wheels, and as they passed

they cast disdainful glances at the honest women who were walking afoot. Then came Gaga, filling up a whole seat and half smothering La Faloise beside her so that little but his small anxious face was visible. Next followed Caroline Héquet with Labordette, Lucy Stewart with Mignon and his boys and at the close of all Nana in a victoria with Steiner and on a bracket seat in front of her that poor, darling Zizi, with his knees jammed against her own.

"It's the last of them, isn't it?" the countess placidly asked Fauchery, pretending at the same time not to recognize Nana.

The wheel of the victoria came near grazing her, but she did not step back. The two women had exchanged a deeply significant glance. It was, in fact, one of those momentary scrutinies which are at once complete and definite. As to the men, they behaved unexceptionably. Fauchery and Daguenet looked icy and recognized no one. The marquis, more nervous than they and afraid of some farcical ebullition on the part of the ladies, had plucked a blade of grass and was rolling it between his fingers. Only Vandeuves, who had stayed somewhat apart from the rest of the company, winked imperceptibly at Lucy, who smiled at him as she passed.

"Be careful!" M. Venot had whispered as he stood behind Count Muffat.

The latter in extreme agitation gazed after this illusive vision of Nana while his wife turned slowly round and scrutinized him. Then he cast his eyes on the ground as though to escape the sound of galloping hoofs which were sweeping away both his senses and his heart. He could have cried aloud in his agony, for, seeing Georges among Nana's skirts, he understood it all now. A mere child! He was brokenhearted at the thought that she should have preferred a mere child to him! Steiner was his equal, but that child!

Mme Hugon, in the meantime, had not at once recognized Georges. Crossing the bridge, he was fain to jump into the river, but Nana's knees restrained him. Then white as a sheet and icy cold, he sat rigidly up in his place and looked at no one. It was just possible no one would notice him.

"Oh, my God!" said the old lady suddenly. "Georges is with her!"

The carriages had passed quite through the uncomfortable crowd of people who recognized and yet gave no sign of recognition. The short critical encounter seemed to have been going on for ages. And now the wheels whirled away the carriageloads of girls more gaily than ever. Toward the fair open country they went, amid the buffetings of the fresh air of heaven. Bright-colored fabrics fluttered in the wind, and the merry laughter burst forth anew as the voyagers began jesting and glancing back at the respectable folks halting with looks of annoyance at the roadside. Turning round, Nana could see the walking party hesitating and then returning the way they had come without crossing the bridge. Mme Hugon was leaning silently on Count Muffat's arm, and so sad was her look that no one dared comfort her.

"I say, did you see Fauchery, dear?" Nana shouted to Lucy, who was leaning out of the carriage in front. "What a brute he was! He shall pay out for that. And Paul, too, a fellow I've been so kind to! Not a sign! They're polite, I'm sure."

And with that she gave Steiner a terrible dressing, he having ventured to

suggest that the gentlemen's attitude had been quite as it should be. So then they weren't even worth a bow? The first blackguard that came by might insult them? Thanks! He was the right sort, too, he was! It couldn't be better! One ought always to bow to a woman.

"Who's the tall one?" asked Lucy at random, shouting through the noise of the wheels.

"It's the Countess Muffat," answered Steiner.

"There now! I suspected as much," said Nana. "Now, my dear fellow, it's all very well her being a countess, for she's no better than she should be. Yes, yes, she's no better than she should be. You know, I've got an eye for such things, I have! And now I know your countess as well as if I had been at the making of her! I'll bet you that she's the mistress of that viper Fauchery! I tell you, she's his mistress! Between women you guess that sort of thing at once!"

Steiner shrugged his shoulders. Since the previous day his irritation had been hourly increasing. He had received letters which necessitated his leaving the following morning, added to which he did not much appreciate coming down to the country in order to sleep on the drawing-room divan.

"And this poor baby boy!" Nana continued, melting suddenly at sight of Georges's pale face as he still sat rigid and breathless in front of her.

"D'you think Mamma recognized me?" he stammered at last.

"Oh, most surely she did! Why, she cried out! But it's my fault. He didn't want to come with us; I forced him to. Now listen, Zizi, would you like me to write to your mamma? She looks such a kind, decent sort of lady! I'll tell her that I never saw you before and that it was Steiner who brought you with him for the first time today."

"No, no, don't write," said Georges in great anxiety. "I'll explain it all myself. Besides, if they bother me about it I shan't go home again."

But he continued plunged in thought, racking his brains for excuses against his return home in the evening. The five carriages were rolling through a flat country along an interminable straight road bordered by fine trees. The country was bathed in a silvery-gray atmosphere. The ladies still continued shouting remarks from carriage to carriage behind the backs of the drivers, who chuckled over their extraordinary fares. Occasionally one of them would rise to her feet to look at the landscape and, supporting herself on her neighbor's shoulder, would grow extremely excited till a sudden jolt brought her down to the seat again. Caroline Héquet in the meantime was having a warm discussion with Labordette. Both of them were agreed that Nana would be selling her country house before three months were out, and Caroline was urging Labordette to buy it back for her for as little as it was likely to fetch. In front of them La Faloise, who was very amorous and could not get at Gaga's apoplectic neck, was imprinting kisses on her spine through her dress, the strained fabric of which was nigh splitting, while Amélie, perching stiffly on the bracket seat, was bidding them be quiet, for she was horrified to be sitting idly by, watching her mother being kissed. In the next carriage Mignon, in order to astonish Lucy, was making his sons recite a fable by La Fontaine. Henri was prodigious

at this exercise; he could spout you one without pause or hesitation. But Maria Blond, at the head of the procession, was beginning to feel extremely bored. She was tired of hoaxing that blockhead of a Tatan Néné with a story to the effect that the Parisian dairywomen were wont to fabricate eggs with a mixture of paste and saffron. The distance was too great: were they never going to get to their destination? And the question was transmitted from carriage to carriage and finally reached Nana, who, after questioning her driver, got up and shouted:

"We've not got a quarter of an hour more to go. You see that church behind the trees down there?"

Then she continued:

"Do you know, it appears the owner of the Château de Chamont is an old lady of Napoleon's time? Oh, *she* was a merry one! At least, so Joseph told me, and he heard it from the servants at the bishop's palace. There's no one like it nowadays, and for the matter of that, she's become goody-goody."

"What's her name?" asked Lucy.

"Madame d'Anglars."

"Irma d'Anglars—I knew her!" cried Gaga.

Admiring exclamations burst from the line of carriages and were borne down the wind as the horses quickened their trot. Heads were stretched out in Gaga's direction; Maria Blond and Tatan Néné turned round and knelt on the seat while they leaned over the carriage hood, and the air was full of questions and cutting remarks, tempered by a certain obscure admiration. Gaga had known her! The idea filled them all with respect for that far-off past.

"Dear me, I was young then," continued Gaga. "But never mind, I remember it all. I saw her pass. They said she was disgusting in her own house, but, driving in her carriage, she *was* just smart! And the stunning tales about her! Dirty doings and money flung about like one o'clock! I don't wonder at all that she's got a fine place. Why, she used to clean out a man's pockets as soon as look at him. Irma d'Anglars still in the land of the living! Why, my little pets, she must be near ninety."

At this the ladies became suddenly serious. Ninety years old! The deuce, there wasn't one of them, as Lucy loudly declared, who would live to that age. They were all done for. Besides, Nana said she didn't want to make old bones; it wouldn't be amusing. They were drawing near their destination, and the conversation was interrupted by the cracking of whips as the drivers put their horses to their best paces. Yet amid all the noise Lucy continued talking and, suddenly changing the subject, urged Nana to come to town with them all tomorrow. The exhibition was soon to close, and the ladies must really return to Paris, where the season was surpassing their expectations. But Nana was obstinate. She loathed Paris; she wouldn't set foot there yet!

"Eh, darling, we'll stay?" she said, giving Georges's knees a squeeze, as though Steiner were of no account.

The carriages had pulled up abruptly, and in some surprise the company got out on some waste ground at the bottom of a small hill. With his whip one of the drivers had to point them out the ruins of the old Abbey of Chamont

where they lay hidden among trees. It was a great sell! The ladies voted them silly. Why, they were only a heap of old stones with briars growing over them and part of a tumble-down tower. It really wasn't worth coming a couple of leagues to see that! Then the driver pointed out to them the countryseat, the park of which stretched away from the abbey, and he advised them to take a little path and follow the walls surrounding it. They would thus make the tour of the place while the carriages would go and await them in the village square. It was a delightful walk, and the company agreed to the proposition.

"Lord love me, Irma knows how to take care of herself!" said Gaga, halting before a gate at the corner of the park wall abutting on the highroad.

All of them stood silently gazing at the enormous bush which stopped up the gateway. Then following the little path, they skirted the park wall, looking up from time to time to admire the trees, whose lofty branches stretched out over them and formed a dense vault of greenery. After three minutes or so they found themselves in front of a second gate. Through this a wide lawn was visible, over which two venerable oaks cast dark masses of shadow. Three minutes farther on yet another gate afforded them an extensive view of a great avenue, a perfect corridor of shadow, at the end of which a bright spot of sunlight gleamed like a star. They stood in silent, wondering admiration, and then little by little exclamations burst from their lips. They had been trying hard to joke about it all with a touch of envy at heart, but this decidedly and immeasurably impressed them. What a genius that Irma was! A sight like this gave you a rattling notion of the woman! The trees stretched away and away, and there were endlessly recurrent patches of ivy along the wall with glimpses of lofty roofs and screens of poplars interspersed with dense masses of elms and aspens. Was there no end to it then? The ladies would have liked to catch sight of the mansion house, for they were weary of circling on and on, weary of seeing nothing but leafy recesses through every opening they came to. They took the rails of the gate in their hands and pressed their faces against the ironwork. And thus excluded and isolated, a feeling of respect began to overcome them as they thought of the castle lost to view in surrounding immensity. Soon, being quite unused to walking, they grew tired. And the wall did not leave off; at every turn of the small deserted path the same range of gray stones stretched ahead of them. Some of them began to despair of ever getting to the end of it and began talking of returning. But the more their long walk fatigued them, the more respectful they became, for at each successive step they were increasingly impressed by the tranquil, lordly dignity of the domain.

"It's getting silly, this is!" said Caroline Héquet, grinding her teeth.

Nana silenced her with a shrug. For some moments past she had been rather pale and extremely serious and had not spoken a single word. Suddenly the path gave a final turn; the wall ended, and as they came out on the village square the mansion house stood before them on the farther side of its grand outer court. All stopped to admire the proud sweep of the wide steps, the twenty frontage windows, the arrangement of the three wings, which were built of brick framed by courses of stone. Henri IV had erewhile inhabited this historic mansion, and his room, with its great bed hung with Genoa velvet,

was still preserved there. Breathless with admiration, Nana gave a little childish sigh.

"Great God!" she whispered very quietly to herself.

But the party were deeply moved when Gaga suddenly announced that Irma herself was standing yonder in front of the church. She recognized her perfectly. She was as upright as of old, the hoary campaigner, and that despite her age, and she still had those eyes which flashed when she moved in that proud way of hers! Vespers were just over, and for a second or two Madame stood in the church porch. She was dressed in a dark brown silk and looked very simple and very tall, her venerable face reminding one of some old marquise who had survived the horrors of the Great Revolution. In her right hand a huge Book of Hours shone in the sunlight, and very slowly she crossed the square, followed some fifteen paces off by a footman in livery. The church was emptying, and all the inhabitants of Chamont bowed before her with extreme respect. An old man even kissed her hand, and a woman wanted to fall on her knees. Truly this was a potent queen, full of years and honors. She mounted her flight of steps and vanished from view.

"That's what one attains to when one has methodical habits!" said Mignon with an air of conviction, looking at his sons and improving the occasion.

Then everybody said his say. Labordette thought her extraordinarily well preserved. Maria Blond let slip a foul expression and vexed Lucy, who declared that one ought to honor gray hairs. All the women, to sum up, agreed that she was a perfect marvel. Then the company got into their conveyances again. From Chamont all the way to La Mignotte Nana remained silent. She had twice turned round to look back at the house, and now, lulled by the sound of the wheels, she forgot that Steiner was at her side and that Georges was in front of her. A vision had come up out of the twilight, and the great lady seemed still to be sweeping by with all the majesty of a potent queen, full of years and of honors.

That evening Georges re-entered Les Fondettes in time for dinner. Nana, who had grown increasingly absent-minded and singular in point of manner, had sent him to ask his mamma's forgiveness. It was his plain duty, she remarked severely, growing suddenly solicitous for the decencies of family life. She even made him swear not to return for the night; she was tired, and in showing proper obedience he was doing no more than his duty. Much bored by this moral discourse, Georges appeared in his mother's presence with heavy heart and downcast head.

Fortunately for him his brother Philippe, a great merry devil of a military man, had arrived during the day, a fact which greatly curtailed the scene he was dreading. Mme Hugon was content to look at him with eyes full of tears while Philippe, who had been put in possession of the facts, threatened to go and drag him home by the scruff of the neck if ever he went back into that woman's society. Somewhat comforted, Georges began slyly planning how to make his escape toward two o'clock next day in order to arrange about future meetings with Nana.

Nevertheless, at dinnertime the house party at Les Fondettes seemed not a

little embarrassed. Vandevures had given notice of departure, for he was anxious to take Lucy back to Paris with him. He was amused at the idea of carrying off this girl whom he had known for ten years yet never desired. The Marquis de Chouard bent over his plate and meditated on Gaga's young lady. He could well remember dandling Lili on his knee. What a way children had of shooting up! This little thing was becoming extremely plump! But Count Muffat especially was silent and absorbed. His cheeks glowed, and he had given Georges one long look. Dinner over, he went upstairs, intending to shut himself in his bedroom, his pretext being a slight feverish attack. M. Venot had rushed after him, and upstairs in the bedroom a scene ensued. The count threw himself upon the bed and strove to stifle a fit of nervous sobbing in the folds of the pillow while M. Venot, in a soft voice, called him brother and advised him to implore heaven for mercy. But he heard nothing: there was a rattle in his throat. Suddenly he sprang off the bed and stammered:

"I am going there. I can't resist any longer."

"Very well," said the old man, "I go with you."

As they left the house two shadows were vanishing into the dark depths of a garden walk, for every evening now Fauchery and the Countess Sabine left Daguenet to help Estelle make tea. Once on the highroad the count walked so rapidly that his companion had to run in order to follow him. Though utterly out of breath, the latter never ceased showering on him the most conclusive arguments against the temptations of the flesh. But the other never opened his mouth as he hurried away into the night. Arrived in front of La Mignotte, he said simply:

"I can't resist any longer. Go!"

"God's will be done then!" muttered M. Venot. "He uses every method to assure His final triumph. Your sin will become His weapon."

At La Mignotte there was much wrangling during the evening meal. Nana had found a letter from Bordenave awaiting her, in which he advised rest, just as though he were anxious to be rid of her. Little Violaine, he said, was being encored twice nightly. But when Mignon continued urging her to come away with them on the morrow Nana grew exasperated and declared that she did not intend taking advice from anybody. In other ways, too, her behavior at table was ridiculously stuck up. Mme Lerat having made some sharp little speech or other, she loudly announced that, God willing, she wasn't going to let anyone—no, not even her own aunt—make improper remarks in her presence. After which she dreed her guests with honorable sentiments. She seemed to be suffering from a fit of stupid right-mindedness, and she treated them all to projects of religious education for Louiset and to a complete scheme of regeneration for herself. When the company began laughing she gave vent to profound opinions, nodding her head like a grocer's wife who knows what she is saying. Nothing but order could lead to fortune! And so far as she was concerned, she had no wish to die like a beggar! She set the ladies' teeth on edge. They burst out in protest. Could anyone have been converting Nana? No, it was impossible! But she sat quite still and with absent looks once more

plunged into dreamland, where the vision of an extremely wealthy and greatly courted Nana rose up before her.

The household were going upstairs to bed when Muffat put in an appearance. It was Labordette who caught sight of him in the garden. He understood it all at once and did him a service, for he got Steiner out of the way and, taking his hand, led him along the dark corridor as far as Nana's bedroom. In affairs of this kind Labordette was wont to display the most perfect tact and cleverness. Indeed, he seemed delighted to be making other people happy. Nana showed no surprise; she was only somewhat annoyed by the excessive heat of Muffat's pursuit. Life was a serious affair, was it not? Love was too silly: it led to nothing. Besides, she had her scruples in view of Zizi's tender age. Indeed, she had scarcely behaved quite fairly toward him. Dear me, yes, she was choosing the proper course again in taking up with an old fellow.

"Zoé," she said to the lady's maid, who was enchanted at the thought of leaving the country, "pack the trunks when you get up tomorrow. We are going back to Paris."

And she went to bed with Muffat but experienced no pleasure.

CHAPTER VII

ONE DECEMBER EVENING three months afterward Count Muffat was strolling in the Passage des Panoramas. The evening was very mild, and owing to a passing shower, the passage had just become crowded with people. There was a perfect mob of them, and they thronged slowly and laboriously along between the shops on either side. Under the windows, white with reflected light, the pavement was violently illuminated. A perfect stream of brilliancy emanated from white globes, red lanterns, blue transparencies, lines of gas jets, gigantic watches and fans, outlined in flame and burning in the open. And the motley displays in the shops, the gold ornaments of the jeweler's, the glass ornaments of the confectioner's, the light-colored silks of the modiste's, seemed to shine again in the crude light of the reflectors behind the clear plate-glass windows, while among the bright-colored, disorderly array of shop signs a huge purple glove loomed in the distance like a bleeding hand which had been severed from an arm and fastened to a yellow cuff.

Count Muffat had slowly returned as far as the boulevard. He glanced out at the roadway and then came sauntering back along the shopwindows. The damp and heated atmosphere filled the narrow passage with a slight luminous mist. Along the flagstones, which had been wet by the drip-drop of umbrellas, the footsteps of the crowd rang continually, but there was no sound of voices. Passers-by elbowed him at every turn and cast inquiring looks at his silent face, which the gaslight rendered pale. And to escape these curious manifestations the count posted himself in front of a stationer's, where with profound attention he contemplated an array of paperweights in the form of glass bowls containing floating landscapes and flowers.

He was conscious of nothing: he was thinking of Nana. Why had she lied to

him again? That morning she had written and told him not to trouble about her in the evening, her excuse being that Louiset was ill and that she was going to pass the night at her aunt's in order to nurse him. But he had felt suspicious and had called at her house, where he learned from the porter that Madame had just gone off to her theater. He was astonished at this, for she was not playing in the new piece. Why then should she have told him this falsehood, and what could she be doing at the Variétés that evening? Hustled by a passer-by, the count unconsciously left the paperweights and found himself in front of a glass case full of toys, where he grew absorbed over an array of pocketbooks and cigar cases, all of which had the same blue swallow stamped on one corner. Nana was most certainly not the same woman! In the early days after his return from the country she used to drive him wild with delight, as with pussycat caresses she kissed him all round his face and whiskers and vowed that he was her own dear pet and the only little man she adored. He was no longer afraid of Georges, whom his mother kept down at Les Fondettes. There was only fat Steiner to reckon with, and he believed he was really ousting him, but he did not dare provoke an explanation on his score. He knew he was once more in an extraordinary financial scrape and on the verge of being declared bankrupt on 'change, so much so that he was clinging fiercely to the shareholders in the Landes Salt Pits and striving to sweat a final subscription out of them. Whenever he met him at Nana's she would explain reasonably enough that she did not wish to turn him out of doors like a dog after all he had spent on her. Besides, for the last three months he had been living in such a whirl of sensual excitement that, beyond the need of possessing her, he had felt no very distinct impressions. His was a tardy awakening of the fleshly instinct, a childish greed of enjoyment, which left no room for either vanity or jealousy. Only one definite feeling could affect him now, and that was Nana's decreasing kindness. She no longer kissed him on the beard! It made him anxious, and as became a man quite ignorant of womankind, he began asking himself what possible cause of offense he could have given her. Besides, he was under the impression that he was satisfying all her desires. And so he harked back again and again to the letter he had received that morning with its tissue of falsehoods, invented for the extremely simple purpose of passing an evening at her own theater. The crowd had pushed him forward again, and he had crossed the passage and was puzzling his brain in front of the entrance to a restaurant, his eyes fixed on some plucked larks and on a huge salmon laid out inside the window.

At length he seemed to tear himself away from this spectacle. He shook himself, looked up and noticed that it was close on nine o'clock. Nana would soon be coming out, and he would make her tell the truth. And with that he walked on and recalled to memory the evenings he once passed in that region in the days when he used to meet her at the door of the theater.

He knew all the shops, and in the gas-laden air he recognized their different scents, such, for instance, as the strong savor of Russia leather, the perfume of vanilla emanating from a chocolate dealer's basement, the savor of musk blown in whiffs from the open doors of the perfumers. But he did not dare

linger under the gaze of the pale shopwomen, who looked placidly at him as though they knew him by sight. For one instant he seemed to be studying the line of little round windows above the shops, as though he had never noticed them before among the medley of signs. Then once again he went up to the boulevard and stood still a minute or two. A fine rain was now falling, and the cold feel of it on his hands calmed him. He thought of his wife who was staying in a country house near Mâcon, where her friend Mme de Chezelles had been ailing a good deal since the autumn. The carriages in the roadway were rolling through a stream of mud. The country, he thought, must be detestable in such vile weather. But suddenly he became anxious and re-entered the hot, close passage down which he strode among the strolling people. A thought struck him: if Nana were suspicious of his presence there she would be off along the Galerie Montmartre.

After that the count kept a sharp lookout at the very door of the theater, though he did not like this passage end, where he was afraid of being recognized. It was at the corner between the Galerie des Variétés and the Galerie Saint-Marc, an equivocal corner full of obscure little shops. Of these last one was a shoemaker's, where customers never seemed to enter. Then there were two or three upholsterers', deep in dust, and a smoky, sleepy reading room and library, the shaded lamps in which cast a green and slumberous light all the evening through. There was never anyone in this corner save well-dressed, patient gentlemen, who prowled about the wreckage peculiar to a stage door, where drunken sceneshifters and ragged chorus girls congregate. In front of the theater a single gas jet in a ground-glass globe lit up the doorway. For a moment or two Muffat thought of questioning Mme Bron; then he grew afraid lest Nana should get wind of his presence and escape by way of the boulevard. So he went on the march again and determined to wait till he was turned out at the closing of the gates, an event which had happened on two previous occasions. The thought of returning home to his solitary bed simply wrung his heart with anguish. Every time that golden-haired girls and men in dirty linen came out and stared at him he returned to his post in front of the reading room, where, looking in between two advertisements posted on a windowpane, he was always greeted by the same sight. It was a little old man, sitting stiff and solitary at the vast table and holding a green newspaper in his green hands under the green light of one of the lamps. But shortly before ten o'clock another gentleman, a tall, good-looking, fair man with well-fitting gloves, was also walking up and down in front of the stage door. Thereupon at each successive turn the pair treated each other to a suspicious sidelong glance. The count walked to the corner of the two galleries, which was adorned with a high mirror, and when he saw himself therein, looking grave and elegant, he was both ashamed and nervous.

Ten o'clock struck, and suddenly it occurred to Muffat that it would be very easy to find out whether Nana were in her dressing room or not. He went up the three steps, crossed the little yellow-painted lobby and slipped into the court by a door which simply shut with a latch. At that hour of the night the narrow, damp well of a court, with its pestiferous water closets, its

fountain, its back view of the kitchen stove and the collection of plants with which the portress used to litter the place, was drenched in dark mist; but the two walls, rising pierced with windows on either hand, were flaming with light, since the property room and the firemen's office were situated on the ground floor, with the managerial bureau on the left, and on the right and upstairs the dressing rooms of the company. The mouths of furnaces seemed to be opening on the outer darkness from top to bottom of this well. The count had at once marked the light in the windows of the dressing room on the first floor, and as a man who is comforted and happy, he forgot where he was and stood gazing upward amid the foul mud and faint decaying smell peculiar to the premises of this antiquated Parisian building. Big drops were dripping from a broken waterspout, and a ray of gaslight slipped from Mme Bron's window and cast a yellow glare over a patch of moss-clad pavement, over the base of a wall which had been rotted by water from a sink, over a whole cornerful of nameless filth amid which old pails and broken crocks lay in fine confusion round a spindling tree growing mildewed in its pot. A window fastening creaked, and the count fled.

Nana was certainly going to come down. He returned to his post in front of the reading room; among its slumbering shadows, which seemed only broken by the glimmer of a night light, the little old man still sat motionless, his side face sharply outlined against his newspaper. Then Muffat walked again and this time took a more prolonged turn and, crossing the large gallery, followed the *Galerie des Variétés* as far as that of Feydeau. The last mentioned was cold and deserted and buried in melancholy shadow. He returned from it, passed by the theater, turned the corner of the *Galerie Saint-Marc* and ventured as far as the *Galerie Montmartre*, where a sugar-chopping machine in front of a grocer's interested him awhile. But when he was taking his third turn he was seized with such dread lest Nana should escape behind his back that he lost all self-respect. Thereupon he stationed himself beside the fair gentleman in front of the very theater. Both exchanged a glance of fraternal humility with which was mingled a touch of distrust, for it was possible they might yet turn out to be rivals. Some scenshifters who came out smoking their pipes between the acts brushed rudely against them, but neither one nor the other ventured to complain. Three big wenches with untidy hair and dirty gowns appeared on the doorstep. They were munching apples and spitting out the cores, but the two men bowed their heads and patiently braved their impudent looks and rough speeches, though they were hustled and, as it were, soiled by these trollops, who amused themselves by pushing each other down upon them.

At that very moment Nana descended the three steps. She grew very pale when she noticed Muffat.

"Oh, it's you!" she stammered.

The sniggering extra ladies were quite frightened when they recognized her, and they formed in line and stood up, looking as stiff and serious as servants whom their mistress has caught behaving badly. The tall fair gentleman had moved away; he was at once reassured and sad at heart.

"Well, give me your arm," Nana continued impatiently.

They walked quietly off. The count had been getting ready to question her and now found nothing to say.

It was she who in rapid tones told a story to the effect that she had been at her aunt's as late as eight o'clock, when, seeing Louiset very much better, she had conceived the idea of going down to the theater for a few minutes.

"On some important business?" he queried.

"Yes, a new piece," she replied after some slight hesitation. "They wanted my advice."

He knew that she was not speaking the truth, but the warm touch of her arm as it leaned firmly on his own, left him powerless. He felt neither anger nor rancor after his long, long wait; his one thought was to keep her where she was now that he had got hold of her. Tomorrow, and not before, he would try and find out what she had come to her dressing room after. But Nana still appeared to hesitate; she was manifestly a prey to the sort of secret anguish that besets people when they are trying to regain lost ground and to initiate a plan of action. Accordingly, as they turned the corner of the *Galerie des Variétés*, she stopped in front of the show in a fan seller's window.

"I say, that's pretty," she whispered; "I mean that mother-of-pearl mount with the feathers."

Then, indifferently:

"So you're seeing me home?"

"Of course," he said, with some surprise, "since your child's better."

She was sorry she had told him that story. Perhaps Louiset was passing through another crisis! She talked of returning to the *Batignolles*. But when he offered to accompany her she did not insist on going. For a second or two she was possessed with the kind of white-hot fury which a woman experiences when she feels herself entrapped and must, nevertheless, behave prettily. But in the end she grew resigned and determined to gain time. If only she could get rid of the count toward midnight everything would happen as she wished.

"Yes, it's true; you're a bachelor tonight," she murmured. "Your wife doesn't return till tomorrow, eh?"

"Yes," replied Muffat. It embarrassed him somewhat to hear her talking familiarly about the countess.

But she pressed him further, asking at what time the train was due and wanting to know whether he were going to the station to meet her. She had begun to walk more slowly than ever, as though the shops interested her very much.

"Now do look!" she said, pausing anew before a jeweler's window, "what a funny bracelet!"

She adored the *Passage des Panoramas*. The tinsel of the *article de Paris*, the false jewelry, the gilded zinc, the cardboard made to look like leather, had been the passion of her early youth. It remained, and when she passed the shop-windows she could not tear herself away from them. It was the same with her today as when she was a ragged, slouching child who fell into reveries in front of the chocolate maker's sweet-stuff shows or stood listening to a musical

box in a neighboring shop or fell into supreme ecstasies over cheap, vulgarly designed knickknacks, such as nutshell workboxes, ragpickers' baskets for holding toothpicks, Vendôme columns and Luxor obelisks on which thermometers were mounted. But that evening she was too much agitated and looked at things without seeing them. When all was said and done, it bored her to think she was not free. An obscure revolt raged within her, and amid it all she felt a wild desire to do something foolish. It was a great thing gained, forsooth, to be mistress of men of position! She had been devouring the prince's substance and Steiner's, too, with her childish caprices, and yet she had no notion where her money went. Even at this time of day her flat in the Boulevard Haussmann was not entirely furnished. The drawing room alone was finished, and with its red satin upholsteries and excess of ornamentation and furniture it struck a decidedly false note. Her creditors, moreover, would now take to tormenting her more than ever before whenever she had no money on hand, a fact which caused her constant surprise, seeing that she was wont to quote herself as a model of economy. For a month past that thief Steiner had been scarcely able to pay up his thousand francs on the occasions when she threatened to kick him out of doors in case he failed to bring them. As to Muffat, he was an idiot: he had no notion as to what it was usual to give, and she could not, therefore, grow angry with him on the score of miserliness. Oh, how gladly she would have turned all these folks off had she not repeated to herself a score of times daily a whole string of economical maxims!

One ought to be sensible, Zoé kept saying every morning, and Nana herself was constantly haunted by the queenly vision seen at Chamont. It had now become an almost religious memory with her, and through dint of being ceaselessly recalled it grew even more grandiose. And for these reasons, though trembling with repressed indignation, she now hung submissively on the count's arm as they went from window to window among the fast-diminishing crowd. The pavement was drying outside, and a cool wind blew along the gallery, swept the close hot air up beneath the glass that imprisoned it and shook the colored lanterns and the lines of gas jets and the giant fan which was flaring away like a set piece in an illumination. At the door of the restaurant a waiter was putting out the gas, while the motionless attendants in the empty, glaring shops looked as though they had dropped off to sleep with their eyes open.

"Oh, what a duck!" continued Nana, retracing her steps as far as the last of the shops in order to go into ecstasies over a porcelain greyhound standing with raised forepaw in front of a nest hidden among roses.

At length they quitted the passage, but she refused the offer of a cab. It was very pleasant out she said; besides, they were in no hurry, and it would be charming to return home on foot. When they were in front of the Café Anglais she had a sudden longing to eat oysters. Indeed, she said that owing to Louiset's illness she had tasted nothing since morning. Muffat dared not oppose her. Yet as he did not in those days wish to be seen about with her he asked for a private supper room and hurried to it along the corridors. She followed him with the air of a woman familiar with the house, and they were on the point of entering a private room, the door of which a waiter held open, when from a

neighboring saloon, whence issued a perfect tempest of shouts and laughter, a man rapidly emerged. It was Daguenet.

"By Jove, it's Nana!" he cried.

The count had briskly disappeared into the private room, leaving the door ajar behind him. But Daguenet winked behind his round shoulders and added in chaffing tones:

"The deuce, but you're doing nicely! You catch 'em in the Tuileries nowadays!"

Nana smiled and laid a finger on her lips to beg him to be silent. She could see he was very much exalted, and yet she was glad to have met him, for she still felt tenderly toward him, and that despite the nasty way he had cut her when in the company of fashionable ladies.

"What are you doing now?" she asked amicably.

"Becoming respectable. Yes indeed, I'm thinking of getting married."

She shrugged her shoulders with a pitying air. But he jokingly continued to the effect that to be only just gaining enough on 'change to buy ladies bouquets could scarcely be called an income, provided you wanted to look respectable too! His three hundred thousand francs had only lasted him eighteen months! He wanted to be practical, and he was going to marry a girl with a huge dowry and end off as a *préfet*, like his father before him! Nana still smiled incredulously. She nodded in the direction of the saloon: "Who are you with in there?"

"Oh, a whole gang," he said, forgetting all about his projects under the influence of returning intoxication. "Just think! Léa is telling us about her trip in Egypt. Oh, it's screaming! There's a bathing story——"

And he told the story while Nana lingered complacently. They had ended by leaning up against the wall in the corridor, facing one another. Gas jets were flaring under the low ceiling, and a vague smell of cookery hung about the folds of the hangings. Now and again, in order to hear each other's voices when the din in the saloon became louder than ever, they had to lean well forward. Every few seconds, however, a waiter with an armful of dishes found his passage barred and disturbed them. But they did not cease their talk for that; on the contrary, they stood close up to the walls and, amid the uproar of the supper party and the jostlings of the waiters, chatted as quietly as if they were by their own firesides.

"Just look at that," whispered the young man, pointing to the door of the private room through which Muffat had vanished.

Both looked. The door was quivering slightly; a breath of air seemed to be disturbing it, and at last, very, very slowly and without the least sound, it was shut to. They exchanged a silent chuckle. The count must be looking charmingly happy all alone in there!

"By the by," she asked, "have you read Fauchery's article about me?"

"Yes, 'The Golden Fly,'" replied Daguenet; "I didn't mention it to you as I was afraid of paining you."

"Paining me—why? His article's a very long one."

She was flattered to think that the *Figaro* should concern itself about her person. But failing the explanations of her hairdresser Francis, who had

brought her the paper, she would not have understood that it was she who was in question. Daguenet scrutinized her slyly, sneering in his chaffing way. Well, well, since she was pleased, everybody else ought to be.

"By your leave!" shouted a waiter, holding a dish of iced cheese in both hands as he separated them.

Nana had stepped toward the little saloon where Muffat was waiting.

"Well, good-by!" continued Daguenet. "Go and find your cuckold again."

But she halted afresh.

"Why d'you call him cuckold?"

"Because he is a cuckold, by Jove!"

She came and leaned against the wall again; she was profoundly interested.

"Ah!" she said simply.

"What, d'you mean to say you didn't know that? Why, my dear girl, his wife's Fauchery's mistress. It probably began in the country. Some time ago, when I was coming here, Fauchery left me, and I suspect he's got an assignation with her at his place tonight. They've made up a story about a journey, I fancy."

Overcome with surprise, Nana remained voiceless.

"I suspected it," she said at last, slapping her leg. "I guessed it by merely looking at her on the highroad that day. To think of its being possible for an honest woman to deceive her husband, and with that blackguard Fauchery too! He'll teach her some pretty things!"

"Oh, it isn't her trial trip," muttered Daguenet wickedly. "Perhaps she knows as much about it as he does."

At this Nana gave vent to an indignant exclamation.

"Indeed she does! What a nice world! It's too foul!"

"By your leave!" shouted a waiter, laden with bottles, as he separated them.

Daguenet drew her forward again and held her hand for a second or two. He adopted his crystalline tone of voice, the voice with notes as sweet as those of a harmonica, which had gained him his success among the ladies of Nana's type.

"Good-by, darling! You know I love you always."

She disengaged her hand from his, and while a thunder of shouts and bravos, which made the door in the saloon tremble again, almost drowned her words she smilingly remarked:

"It's over between us, stupid! But that doesn't matter. Do come up one of these days, and we'll have a chat."

Then she became serious again and in the outraged tones of a respectable woman:

"So he's a cuckold, is he?" she cried. "Well, that *is* a nuisance, dear boy. They've always sickened me, cuckolds have."

When at length she went into the private room she noticed that Muffat was sitting resignedly on a narrow divan with pale face and twitching hands. He did not reproach her at all, and she, greatly moved, was divided between feelings of pity and of contempt. The poor man! To think of his being so unworthily cheated by a vile wife! She had a good mind to throw her arms round

his neck and comfort him. But it was only fair all the same! He was a fool with women, and this would teach him a lesson! Nevertheless, pity overcame her. She did not get rid of him as she had determined to do after the oysters had been discussed. They scarcely stayed a quarter of an hour in the Café Anglais, and together they went into the house in the Boulevard Haussmann. It was then eleven. Before midnight she would have easily have discovered some means of getting rid of him kindly.

In the anteroom, however, she took the precaution of giving Zoé an order.

"You'll look out for him, and you'll tell him not to make a noise if the other man's still with me."

"But where shall I put him, madame?"

"Keep him in the kitchen. It's more safe."

In the room inside Muffat was already taking off his overcoat. A big fire was burning on the hearth. It was the same room as of old, with its rosewood furniture and its hangings and chair coverings of figured damask with the large blue flowers on a gray background. On two occasions Nana had thought of having it redone, the first in black velvet, the second in white satin with bows, but directly Steiner consented she demanded the money that these changes would cost simply with a view to pillaging him. She had, indeed, only indulged in a tiger skin rug for the hearth and a cut-glass hanging lamp.

"I'm not sleepy; I'm not going to bed," she said the moment they were shut in together.

The count obeyed her submissively, as became a man no longer afraid of being seen. His one care now was to avoid vexing her.

"As you will," he murmured.

Nevertheless, he took his boots off, too, before seating himself in front of the fire. One of Nana's pleasures consisted in undressing herself in front of the mirror on her wardrobe door, which reflected her whole height. She would let everything slip off her in turn and then would stand perfectly naked and gaze and gaze in complete oblivion of all around her. Passion for her own body, ecstasy over her satin skin and the supple contours of her shape, would keep her serious, attentive and absorbed in the love of herself. The hairdresser frequently found her standing thus and would enter without her once turning to look at him. Muffat used to grow angry then, but he only succeeded in astonishing her. What was coming over the man? She was doing it to please herself, not other people.

That particular evening she wanted to have a better view of herself, and she lit the six candles attached to the frame of the mirror. But while letting her shift slip down she paused. She had been preoccupied for some moments past, and a question was on her lips.

"You haven't read the *Figaro* article, have you? The paper's on the table."

Daguenet's laugh had recurred to her recollections, and she was harassed by a doubt. If that Fauchery had slandered her she would be revenged.

"They say that it's about me," she continued, affecting indifference. "What's your notion, eh, darling?"

And letting go her shift and waiting till Muffat should have done reading,

she stood naked. Muffat was reading slowly Fauchery's article entitled "The Golden Fly," describing the life of a harlot descended from four or five generations of drunkards and tainted in her blood by a cumulative inheritance of misery and drink, which in her case has taken the form of a nervous exaggeration of the sexual instinct. She has shot up to womanhood in the slums and on the pavements of Paris, and tall, handsome and as superbly grown as a dunghill plant, she avenges the beggars and outcasts of whom she is the ultimate product. With her the rottenness that is allowed to ferment among the populace is carried upward and rots the aristocracy. She becomes a blind power of nature, a leaven of destruction, and unwittingly she corrupts and disorganizes all Paris, churning it between her snow-white thighs as milk is monthly churned by housewives. And it was at the end of this article that the comparison with a fly occurred, a fly of sunny hue which has flown up out of the dung, a fly which sucks in death on the carrion tolerated by the roadside and then buzzing, dancing and glittering like a precious stone enters the windows of palaces and poisons the men within by merely settling on them in her flight.

Muffat lifted his head; his eyes stared fixedly; he gazed at the fire.

"Well?" asked Nana.

But he did not answer. It seemed as though he wanted to read the article again. A cold, shivering feeling was creeping from his scalp to his shoulders. This article had been written anyhow. The phrases were wildly extravagant; the unexpected epigrams and quaint collocations of words went beyond all bounds. Yet notwithstanding this, he was struck by what he had read, for it had rudely awakened within him much that for months past he had not cared to think about.

He looked up. Nana had grown absorbed in her ecstatic self-contemplation. She was bending her neck and was looking attentively in the mirror at a little brown mark above her right haunch. She was touching it with the tip of her finger and by dint of bending backward was making it stand out more clearly than ever. Situated where it was, it doubtless struck her as both quaint and pretty. After that she studied other parts of her body with an amused expression and much of the vicious curiosity of a child. The sight of herself always astonished her, and she would look as surprised and ecstatic as a young girl who has discovered her puberty. Slowly, slowly, she spread out her arms in order to give full value to her figure, which suggested the torso of a plump Venus. She bent herself this way and that and examined herself before and behind, stooping to look at the side view of her bosom and at the sweeping contours of her thighs. And she ended with a strange amusement which consisted of swinging to right and left, her knees apart and her body swaying from the waist with the perpetual jogging, twitching movements peculiar to an oriental dancer in the *danse du ventre*.

Muffat sat looking at her. She frightened him. The newspaper had dropped from his hand. For a moment he saw her as she was, and he despised himself. Yes, it was just that; she had corrupted his life; he already felt himself tainted to his very marrow by impurities hitherto undreamed of. Everything was

now destined to rot within him, and in the twinkling of an eye he understood what this evil entailed. He saw the ruin brought about by this kind of "leaven"—himself poisoned, his family destroyed, a bit of the social fabric cracking and crumbling. And unable to take his eyes from the sight, he sat looking fixedly at her, striving to inspire himself with loathing for her nakedness.

Nana no longer moved. With an arm behind her neck, one hand clasped in the other, and her elbows far apart, she was throwing back her head so that he could see a foreshortened reflection of her half-closed eyes, her parted lips, her face clothed with amorous laughter. Her masses of yellow hair were unknotted behind, and they covered her back with the fell of a lioness.

Bending back thus, she displayed her solid Amazonian waist and firm bosom, where strong muscles moved under the satin texture of the skin. A delicate line, to which the shoulder and the thigh added their slight undulations, ran from one of her elbows to her foot, and Muffat's eyes followed this tender profile and marked how the outlines of the fair flesh vanished in golden gleams and how its rounded contours shone like silk in the candlelight. He thought of his old dread of Woman, of the Beast of the Scriptures, at once lewd and wild. Nana was all covered with fine hair; a russet made her body velvety, while the Beast was apparent in the almost equine development of her flanks, in the fleshy exuberances and deep hollows of her body, which lent her sex the mystery and suggestiveness lurking in their shadows. She was, indeed, that Golden Creature, blind as brute force, whose very odor ruined the world. Muffat gazed and gazed as a man possessed, till at last, when he had shut his eyes in order to escape it, the Brute reappeared in the darkness of the brain, larger, more terrible, more suggestive in its attitude. Now, he understood, it would remain before his eyes, in his very flesh, forever.

But Nana was gathering herself together. A little thrill of tenderness seemed to have traversed her members. Her eyes were moist; she tried, as it were, to make herself small, as though she could feel herself better thus. Then she threw her head and bosom back and, melting, as it were, in one great bodily caress, she rubbed her cheeks coaxingly, first against one shoulder, then against the other. Her lustful mouth breathed desire over her limbs. She put out her lips, kissed herself long in the neighborhood of her armpit and laughed at the other Nana who also was kissing herself in the mirror.

Then Muffat gave a long sigh. This solitary pleasure exasperated him. Suddenly all his resolutions were swept away as though by a mighty wind. In a fit of brutal passion he caught Nana to his breast and threw her down on the carpet.

"Leave me alone!" she cried. "You're hurting me!"

He was conscious of his undoing; he recognized in her stupidity, vileness and falsehood, and he longed to possess her, poisoned though she was.

"Oh, you're a fool!" she said savagely when he let her get up.

Nevertheless, she grew calm. He would go now. She slipped on a night-gown trimmed with lace and came and sat down on the floor in front of the fire. It was her favorite position. When she again questioned him about Fauchery's article Muffat replied vaguely, for he wanted to avoid a scene.

Besides, she declared that she had found a weak spot in Fauchery. And with that she relapsed into a long silence and reflected on how to dismiss the count. She would have liked to do it in an agreeable way, for she was still a good-natured wench, and it bored her to cause others pain, especially in the present instance where the man was a cuckold. The mere thought of his being that had ended by rousing her sympathies!

"So you expect your wife tomorrow morning?" she said at last.

Muffat had stretched himself in an armchair. He looked drowsy, and his limbs were tired. He gave a sign of assent. Nana sat gazing seriously at him with a dull tumult in her brain. Propped on one leg, among her slightly rumpled laces she was holding one of her bare feet between her hands and was turning it mechanically about and about.

"Have you been married long?" she asked.

"Nineteen years," replied the count.

"Ah! And is your wife amiable? Do you get on comfortably together?"

He was silent. Then with some embarrassment:

"You know I've begged you never to talk of those matters."

"Dear me, why's that?" she cried, beginning to grow vexed directly. "I'm sure I won't eat your wife if I *do* talk about her. Dear boy, why, every woman's worth—"

But she stopped for fear of saying too much. She contented herself by assuming a superior expression, since she considered herself extremely kind. The poor fellow, he needed delicate handling! Besides, she had been struck by a laughable notion, and she smiled as she looked him carefully over.

"I say," she continued, "I haven't told you the story about you that Fauchery's circulating. There's a viper, if you like! I don't bear him any ill will, because his article may be all right, but he's a regular viper all the same."

And laughing more gaily than ever, she let go her foot and, crawling along the floor, came and propped herself against the count's knees.

"Now just fancy, he swears you were still like a babe when you married your wife. You were still like that, eh? Is it true, eh?"

Her eyes pressed for an answer, and she raised her hands to his shoulders and began shaking him in order to extract the desired confession.

"Without doubt," he at last made answer gravely.

Thereupon she again sank down at his feet. She was shaking with uproarious laughter, and she stuttered and dealt him little slaps.

"No, it's too funny! There's no one like you; you're a marvel. But, my poor pet, you must just have been stupid! When a man doesn't know—oh, it is so comical! Good heavens, I should have liked to have seen you! And it came off well, did it? Now tell me something about it! Oh, do, do tell me!"

She overwhelmed him with questions, forgetting nothing and requiring the veriest details. And she laughed such sudden merry peals which doubled her up with mirth, and her chemise slipped and got turned down to such an extent, and her skin looked so golden in the light of the big fire, that little by little the count described to her his bridal night. He no longer felt at all awkward. He himself began to be amused at last as he spoke. Only he kept choosing his

phrases, for he still had a certain sense of modesty. The young woman, now thoroughly interested, asked him about the countess. According to his account, she had a marvelous figure but was a regular iceberg for all that.

"Oh, get along with you!" he muttered indolently. "You have no cause to be jealous."

Nana had ceased laughing, and she now resumed her former position and, with her back to the fire, brought her knees up under her chin with her clasped hands. Then in a serious tone she declared:

"It doesn't pay, dear boy, to look like a ninny with one's wife the first night."

"Why?" queried the astonished count.

"Because," she replied slowly, assuming a doctorial expression.

And with that she looked as if she were delivering a lecture and shook her head at him. In the end, however, she condescended to explain herself more lucidly.

"Well, look here! I know how it all happens. Yes, dearie, women don't like a man to be foolish. They don't say anything because there's such a thing as modesty, you know, but you may be sure they think about it for a jolly long time to come. And sooner or later, when a man's been an ignoramus, they go and make other arrangements. That's it, my pet."

He did not seem to understand. Whereupon she grew more definite still. She became maternal and taught him his lesson out of sheer goodness of heart, as a friend might do. Since she had discovered him to be a cuckold the information had weighed on her spirits; she was madly anxious to discuss his position with him.

"Good heavens! I'm talking of things that don't concern me. I've said what I have because everybody ought to be happy. We're having a chat, eh? Well then, you're to answer me as straight as you can."

But she stopped to change her position, for she was burning herself.

"It's jolly hot, eh? My back's roasted. Wait a second. I'll cook my tummy a bit. That's what's good for the aches!"

And when she had turned round with her breast to the fire and her feet tucked under her:

"Let me see," she said; "you don't sleep with your wife any longer?"

"No, I swear to you I don't," said Muffat, dreading a scene.

"And you believe she's really a stick?"

He bowed his head in the affirmative.

"And that's why you love me? Answer me! I shan't be angry."

He repeated the same movement.

"Very well then," she concluded. "I suspected as much! Oh, the poor pet. Do you know my aunt Lerat? When she comes get her to tell you the story about the fruiterer who lives opposite her. Just fancy that man— Damn it, how hot this fire is! I must turn round. I'm going to roast my left side now."

And as she presented her side to the blaze a droll idea struck her, and like a good-tempered thing, she made fun of herself for she was delighted to see that she was looking so plump and pink in the light of the coal fire.

"I look like a goose, eh? Yes, that's it! I'm a goose on the spit, and I'm turning, turning and cooking in my own juice, eh?"

And she was once more indulging in a merry fit of laughter when a sound of voices and slamming doors became audible. Muffat was surprised, and he questioned her with a look. She grew serious, and an anxious expression came over her face. It must be Zoé's cat, a cursed beast that broke everything. It was half-past twelve o'clock. How long was she going to bother herself in her cuckold's behalf? Now that the other man had come she ought to get him out of the way, and that quickly.

"What were you saying?" asked the count complaisantly, for he was charmed to see her so kind to him.

But in her desire to be rid of him she suddenly changed her mood, became brutal and did not take care what she was saying.

"Oh yes! The fruiterer and his wife. Well, my dear fellow, they never once touched one another! Not the least bit! She was very keen on it, you understand, but he, the ninny, didn't know it. He was so green that he thought her a stick, and so he went elsewhere and took up with streetwalkers, who treated him to all sorts of nastiness, while she, on her part, made up for it beautifully with fellows who were a lot slyer than her greenhorn of a husband. And things always turn out that way through people not understanding one another. I know it, I do!"

Muffat was growing pale. At last he was beginning to understand her allusions, and he wanted to make her keep silence. But she was in full swing.

"No, hold your tongue, will you? If you weren't brutes you would be as nice with your wives as you are with us, and if your wives weren't geese they would take as much pains to keep you as we do to get you. That's the way to behave. Yes, my duck, you can put that in your pipe and smoke it."

"Do not talk of honest women," he said in a hard voice. "You do not know them."

At that Nana rose to her knees.

"I don't know them! Why, they aren't even clean, your honest women aren't! They aren't even clean! I defy you to find me one who would dare show herself as I am doing. Oh, you make me laugh with your honest women! Don't drive me to it; don't oblige me to tell you things I may regret afterward."

The count, by way of answer, mumbled something insulting. Nana became quite pale in her turn. For some seconds she looked at him without speaking. Then in her decisive way:

"What would you do if your wife were deceiving you?"

He made a threatening gesture.

"Well, and if I were to?"

"Oh, you," he muttered with a shrug of his shoulders.

Nana was certainly not spiteful. Since the beginning of the conversation she had been strongly tempted to throw his cuckold's reputation in his teeth, but she had resisted. She would have liked to confess him quietly on the subject, but he had begun to exasperate her at last. The matter ought to stop now.

"Well, then, my dearie," she continued, "I don't know what you're getting

at with me. For two hours past you've been worrying my life out. Now do just go and find your wife, for she's at it with Fauchery. Yes, it's quite correct; they're in the Rue Taitbout, at the corner of the Rue de Provence. You see, I'm giving you the address."

Then triumphantly, as she saw Muffat stagger to his feet like an ox under the hammer:

"If honest women must meddle in our affairs and take our sweethearts from us— Oh, you bet they're a nice lot, those honest women!"

But she was unable to proceed. With a terrible push he had cast her full length on the floor and, lifting his heel, he seemed on the point of crushing in her head in order to silence her. For the twinkling of an eye she felt sickening dread. Blinded with rage, he had begun beating about the room like a maniac. Then his choking silence and the struggle with which he was shaken melted her to tears. She felt a mortal regret and, rolling herself up in front of the fire so as to roast her right side, she undertook the task of comforting him.

"I take my oath, darling, I thought you knew it all. Otherwise I shouldn't have spoken; you may be sure. But perhaps it isn't true. I don't say anything for certain. I've been told it, and people are talking about it, but what does that prove? Oh, get along! You're very silly to grow riled about it. If I were a man I shouldn't care a rush for the women! All the women are alike, you see, high or low; they're all rowdy and the rest of it."

In a fit of self-abnegation she was severe on womankind, for she wished thus to lessen the cruelty of her blow. But he did not listen to her or hear what she said. With fumbling movements he had put on his boots and his overcoat. For a moment longer he raved round, and then in a final outburst, finding himself near the door, he rushed from the room. Nana was very much annoyed.

"Well, well! A prosperous trip to you!" she continued aloud, though she was now alone. "He's polite, too, that fellow is, when he's spoken to! And I had to defend myself at that! Well, I was the first to get back my temper and I made plenty of excuses, I'm thinking! Besides, he had been getting on my nerves!"

Nevertheless, she was not happy and sat scratching her legs with both hands. Then she took high ground:

"Tut, tut, it isn't my fault if he is a cuckold!"

And toasted on every side and as hot as a roast bird, she went and buried herself under the bedclothes after ringing for Zoé to usher in the other man, who was waiting in the kitchen.

Once outside, Muffat began walking at a furious pace. A fresh shower had just fallen, and he kept slipping on the greasy pavement. When he looked mechanically up into the sky he saw ragged, soot-colored clouds scudding in front of the moon. At this hour of the night passers-by were becoming few and far between in the Boulevard Haussmann. He skirted the enclosures round the opera house in his search for darkness, and as he went along he kept mumbling inconsequent phrases. That girl had been lying. She had invented her story out of sheer stupidity and cruelty. He ought to have crushed

her head when he had it under his heel. After all was said and done, the business was too shameful. Never would he see her; never would he touch her again, or if he did he would be miserably weak. And with that he breathed hard, as though he were free once more. Oh, that naked, cruel monster, roasting away like any goose and slaving over everything that he had respected for forty years back. The moon had come out, and the empty street was bathed in white light. He felt afraid, and he burst into a great fit of sobbing, for he had grown suddenly hopeless and maddened as though he had sunk into a fathomless void.

"My God!" he stuttered out. "It's finished! There's nothing left now!"

Along the boulevards belated people were hurrying. He tried hard to be calm, and as the story told him by that courtesan kept recurring to his burning consciousness, he wanted to reason the matter out. The countess was coming up from Mme de Chezelles's country house tomorrow morning. Yet nothing, in fact, could have prevented her from returning to Paris the night before and passing it with that man. He now began recalling to mind certain details of their stay at Les Fondettes. One evening, for instance, he had surprised Sabine in the shade of some trees, when she was so much agitated as to be unable to answer his questions. The man had been present; why should she not be with him now? The more he thought about it the more possible the whole story became, and he ended by thinking it natural and even inevitable. While he was in his shirt sleeves in the house of a harlot his wife was undressing in her lover's room. Nothing could be simpler or more logical! Reasoning in this way, he forced himself to keep cool. He felt as if there were a great downward movement in the direction of fleshly madness, a movement which, as it grew, was overcoming the whole world round about him. Warm images pursued him in imagination. A naked Nana suddenly evoked a naked Sabine. At this vision, which seemed to bring them together in shameless relationship and under the influence of the same lusts, he literally stumbled, and in the road a cab nearly ran over him. Some women who had come out of a café jostled him amid loud laughter. Then a fit of weeping once more overcame him, despite all his efforts to the contrary, and, not wishing to shed tears in the presence of others, he plunged into a dark and empty street. It was the Rue Rossini, and along its silent length he wept like a child.

"It's over with us," he said in hollow tones. "There's nothing left us now, nothing left us now!"

He wept so violently that he had to lean up against a door as he buried his face in his wet hands. A noise of footsteps drove him away. He felt a shame and a fear which made him fly before people's faces with the restless step of a bird of darkness. When passers-by met him on the pavement he did his best to look and walk in a leisurely way, for he fancied they were reading his secret in the very swing of his shoulders. He had followed the Rue de la Grange Batelière as far as the Rue du Faubourg Montmartre, where the brilliant lamplight surprised him, and he retraced his steps. For nearly an hour he traversed the district thus, choosing always the darkest corners. Doubtless there was some goal whither his steps were patiently, instinctively, leading

him through a labyrinth of endless turnings. At length he lifted his eyes up at a street corner. He had reached his destination, the point where the Rue Taitbout and the Rue de la Provence met. He had taken an hour amid his painful mental sufferings to arrive at a place he could have reached in five minutes. One morning a month ago he remembered going up to Fauchery's rooms to thank him for a notice of a ball at the Tuileries, in which the journalist had mentioned him. The flat was between the ground floor and the first story and had a row of small square windows which were half hidden by the colossal signboard belonging to a shop. The last window on the left was bisected by a brilliant band of lamplight coming from between the half-closed curtains. And he remained absorbed and expectant, with his gaze fixed on this shining streak.

The moon had disappeared in an inky sky, whence an icy drizzle was falling. Two o'clock struck at the Trinité. The Rue de Provence and the Rue Taitbout lay in shadow, bestarred at intervals by bright splashes of light from the gas lamps, which in the distance were merged in yellow mist. Muffat did not move from where he was standing. That was the room. He remembered it now: it had hangings of red "andrinople," and a Louis XIII bed stood at one end of it. The lamp must be standing on the chimney piece to the right. Without doubt they had gone to bed, for no shadows passed across the window, and the bright streak gleamed as motionless as the light of a night lamp. With his eyes still uplifted he began forming a plan; he would ring the bell, go upstairs despite the porter's remonstrances, break the doors in with a push of his shoulder and fall upon them in the very bed without giving them time to unlance their arms. For one moment the thought that he had no weapon upon him gave him pause, but directly afterward he decided to throttle them. He returned to the consideration of his project, and he perfected it while waiting for some sign, some indication, which should bring certainty with it.

Had a woman's shadow only shown itself at that moment he would have rung. But the thought that perhaps he was deceiving himself froze him. How could he be certain? Doubts began to return. His wife could not be with that man. It was monstrous and impossible. Nevertheless, he stayed where he was and was gradually overcome by a species of torpor which merged into sheer feebleness while he waited long, and the fixity of his gaze induced hallucinations.

A shower was falling. Two policemen were approaching, and he was forced to leave the doorway where he had taken shelter. When these were lost to view in the Rue de Provence he returned to his post, wet and shivering. The luminous streak still traversed the window, and this time he was going away for good when a shadow crossed it. It moved so quickly that he thought he had deceived himself. But first one and then another black thing followed quickly after it, and there was a regular commotion in the room. Riveted anew to the pavement, he experienced an intolerable burning sensation in his inside as he waited to find out the meaning of it all. Outlines of arms and legs flitted after one another, and an enormous hand traveled about with the silhouette of a water jug. He distinguished nothing clearly, but he thought he

recognized a woman's headdress. And he disputed the point with himself; it might well have been Sabine's hair, only the neck did not seem sufficiently slim. At that hour of the night he had lost the power of recognition and of action. In this terrible agony of uncertainty his inside caused him such acute suffering that he pressed against the door in order to calm himself, shivering like a man in rags, as he did so. Then seeing that despite everything he could not turn his eyes away from the window, his anger changed into a fit of moralizing. He fancied himself a deputy; he was haranguing an assembly, loudly denouncing debauchery, prophesying national ruin. And he reconstructed Fauchery's article on the poisoned fly, and he came before the house and declared that morals such as these, which could only be paralleled in the days of the later Roman Empire, rendered society an impossibility; that did him good. But the shadows had meanwhile disappeared. Doubtless they had gone to bed again, and, still watching, he continued waiting where he was.

Three o'clock struck, then four, but he could not take his departure. When showers fell he buried himself in a corner of the doorway, his legs splashed with wet. Nobody passed by now, and occasionally his eyes would close, as though scorched by the streak of light, which he kept watching obstinately, fixedly, with idiotic persistence. On two subsequent occasions the shadows flitted about, repeating the same gestures and agitating the silhouette of the same gigantic jug, and twice quiet was re-established, and the night lamp again glowed discreetly out. These shadows only increased his uncertainty. Then, too, a sudden idea soothed his brain while it postponed the decisive moment. After all, he had only to wait for the woman when she left the house. He could quite easily recognize Sabine. Nothing could be simpler, and there would be no scandal, and he would be sure of things one way or the other. It was only necessary to stay where he was. Among all the confused feelings which had been agitating him he now merely felt a dull need of certain knowledge. But sheer weariness and vacancy began lulling him to sleep under his doorway, and by way of distraction he tried to reckon up how long he would have to wait. Sabine was to be at the station toward nine o'clock; that meant about four hours and a half more. He was very patient; he would even have been content not to move again, and he found a certain charm in fancying that his night vigil would last through eternity.

Suddenly the streak of light was gone. This extremely simple event was to him an unforeseen catastrophe, at once troublesome and disagreeable. Evidently they had just put the lamp out and were going to sleep. It was reasonable enough at that hour, but he was irritated thereat, for now the darkened window ceased to interest him. He watched it for a quarter of an hour longer and then grew tired and, leaving the doorway, took a turn upon the pavement. Until five o'clock he walked to and fro, looking upward from time to time. The window seemed a dead thing, and now and then he asked himself if he had not dreamed that shadows had been dancing up there behind the panes. An intolerable sense of fatigue weighed him down, a dull, heavy feeling, under the influence of which he forgot what he was waiting for at that particular street corner. He kept stumbling on the pavement and starting into wakeful-

ness with the icy shudder of a man who does not know where he is. Nothing seemed to justify the painful anxiety he was inflicting on himself. Since those people were asleep—well then, let them sleep! What good could it do mixing in their affairs? It was very dark; no one would ever know anything about this night's doings. And with that every sentiment within him, down to curiosity itself, took flight before the longing to have done with it all and to find relief somewhere. The cold was increasing, and the street was becoming insufferable. Twice he walked away and slowly returned, dragging one foot behind the other, only to walk farther away next time. It was all over; nothing was left him now, and so he went down the whole length of the boulevard and did not return.

His was a melancholy progress through the streets. He walked slowly, never changing his pace and simply keeping along the walls of the houses.

His boot heels re-echoed, and he saw nothing but his shadow moving at his side. As he neared each successive gaslight it grew taller and immediately afterward diminished. But this lulled him and occupied him mechanically. He never knew afterward where he had been; it seemed as if he had dragged himself round and round in a circle for hours. One reminiscence only was very distinctly retained by him. Without his being able to explain how it came about he found himself with his face pressed close against the gate at the end of the Passage des Panoramas and his two hands grasping the bars. He did not shake them but, his whole heart swelling with emotion, he simply tried to look into the passage. But he could make nothing out clearly, for shadows flooded the whole length of the deserted gallery, and the wind, blowing hard down the Rue Saint-Marc, puffed in his face with the damp breath of a cellar. For a time he tried doggedly to see into the place, and then, awakening from his dream, he was filled with astonishment and asked himself what he could possibly be seeking for at that hour and in that position, for he had pressed against the railings so fiercely that they had left their mark on his face. Then he went on tramp once more. He was hopeless, and his heart was full of infinite sorrow, for he felt, amid all those shadows, that he was evermore betrayed and alone.

Day broke at last. It was the murky dawn that follows winter nights and looks so melancholy from muddy Paris pavements. Muffat had returned into the wide streets, which were then in course of construction on either side of the new opera house. Soaked by the rain and cut up by cart wheels, the chalky soil had become a lake of liquid mire. But he never looked to see where he was stepping and walked on and on, slipping and regaining his footing as he went. The awakening of Paris, with its gangs of sweepers and early workmen trooping to their destinations, added to his troubles as day brightened. People stared at him in surprise as he went by with scared look and soaked hat and muddy clothes. For a long while he sought refuge against palings and among scaffoldings, his desolate brain haunted by the single remaining thought that he was very miserable.

Then he thought of God. The sudden idea of divine help, of superhuman consolation, surprised him, as though it were something unforeseen and ex-

traordinary. The image of M. Venot was evoked thereby, and he saw his little plump face and ruined teeth. Assuredly M. Venot, whom for months he had been avoiding and thereby rendering miserable, would be delighted were he to go and knock at his door and fall weeping into his arms. In the old days God had been always so merciful toward him. At the least sorrow, the slightest obstacle on the path of life, he had been wont to enter a church, where, kneeling down, he would humble his littleness in the presence of Omnipotence. And he had been used to go forth thence, fortified by prayer, fully prepared to give up the good things of this world, possessed by the single yearning for eternal salvation. But at present he only practiced by fits and starts, when the terror of hell came upon him. All kinds of weak inclinations had overcome him, and the thought of Nana disturbed his devotions. And now the thought of God astonished him. Why had he not thought of God before, in the hour of that terrible agony when his feeble humanity was breaking up in ruin?

Meanwhile with slow and painful steps he sought for a church. But he had lost his bearings; the early hour had changed the face of the streets. Soon, however, as he turned the corner of the Rue de la Chaussée-d'Antin, he noticed a tower looming vaguely in the fog at the end of the Trinité Church. The white statues overlooking the bare garden seemed like so many chilly Venuses among the yellow foliage of a park. Under the porch he stood and panted a little, for the ascent of the wide steps had tired him. Then he went in. The church was very cold, for its heating apparatus had been fireless since the previous evening, and its lofty, vaulted aisles were full of a fine damp vapor which had come filtering through the windows. The aisles were deep in shadow; not a soul was in the church, and the only sound audible amid the unlovely darkness was that made by the old shoes of some verger or other who was dragging himself about in sulky semiwakefulness. Muffat, however, after knocking forlornly against an untidy collection of chairs, sank on his knees with bursting heart and propped himself against the rails in front of a little chapel close by a font. He clasped his hands and began searching within himself for suitable prayers, while his whole being yearned toward a transport. But only his lips kept stammering empty words; his heart and brain were far away, and with them he returned to the outer world and began his long, unresting march through the streets, as though lashed forward by implacable necessity. And he kept repeating, "O my God, come to my assistance! O my God, abandon not Thy creature, who delivers himself up to Thy justice! O my God, I adore Thee: Thou wilt not leave me to perish under the buffetings of mine enemies!" Nothing answered: the shadows and the cold weighed upon him, and the noise of the old shoes continued in the distance and prevented him praying. Nothing, indeed, save that tiresome noise was audible in the deserted church, where the matutinal sweeping was unknown before the early masses had somewhat warmed the air of the place. After that he rose to his feet with the help of a chair, his knees cracking under him as he did so. God was not yet there. And why should he weep in M. Venot's arms? The man could do nothing.

And then mechanically he returned to Nana's house. Outside he slipped,

and he felt the tears welling to his eyes again, but he was not angry with his lot—he was only feeble and ill. Yes, he was too tired; the rain had wet him too much; he was nipped with cold, but the idea of going back to his great dark house in the Rue Miromesnil froze his heart. The house door at Nana's was not open as yet, and he had to wait till the porter made his appearance. He smiled as he went upstairs, for he already felt penetrated by the soft warmth of that cozy retreat, where he would be able to stretch his limbs and go to sleep.

When Zoé opened the door to him she gave a start of most uneasy astonishment. Madame had been taken ill with an atrocious sick headache, and she hadn't closed her eyes all night. Still, she could quite go and see whether Madame had gone to sleep for good. And with that she slipped into the bedroom while he sank back into one of the armchairs in the drawing room. But almost at that very moment Nana appeared. She had jumped out of bed and had scarce had time to slip on a petticoat. Her feet were bare, her hair in wild disorder, her nightgown all crumpled.

"What! You here again?" she cried with a red flush on her cheeks.

Up she rushed, stung by sudden indignation, in order herself to thrust him out of doors. But when she saw him in such sorry plight—nay, so utterly done for—she felt infinite pity.

"Well, you are a pretty sight, my dear fellow!" she continued more gently. "But what's the matter? You've spotted them, eh? And it's given you the hump?"

He did not answer; he looked like a broken-down animal. Nevertheless, she came to the conclusion that he still lacked proofs, and to hearten him up she said:

"You see now? I was on the wrong tack. Your wife's an honest woman, on my word of honor! And now, my little friend, you must go home to bed. You want it badly."

He did not stir.

"Now then, be off! I can't keep you here. But perhaps you won't presume to stay at such a time as this?"

"Yes, let's go to bed," he stammered.

She repressed a violent gesture, for her patience was deserting her. Was the man going crazy?

"Come, be off!" she repeated.

"No."

But she flared up in exasperation, in utter rebellion.

"It's sickening! Don't you understand I'm jolly tired of your company? Go and find your wife, who's making a cuckold of you. Yes, she's making a cuckold of you. I say so—yes, I do now. There, you've got the sack! Will you leave me or will you not?"

Muffat's eyes filled with tears. He clasped his hands together.

"Oh, let's go to bed!"

At this Nana suddenly lost all control over herself and was choked by nervous sobs. She was being taken advantage of when all was said and done! What

had these stories to do with her? She certainly had used all manner of delicate methods in order to teach him his lesson gently. And now he was for making her pay the damages! No, thank you! She was kindhearted, but not to that extent.

"The devil, but I've had enough of this!" she swore, bringing her fist down on the furniture. "Yes, yes, I wanted to be faithful—it was all I could do to be that! Yet if I spoke the word I could be rich tomorrow, my dear fellow!"

He looked up in surprise. Never once had he thought of the monetary question. If she only expressed a desire he would realize it at once; his whole fortune was at her service.

"No, it's too late now," she replied furiously. "I like men who give without being asked. No, if you were to offer me a million for a single interview I should say no! It's over between us; I've got other fish to fry there! So be off or I shan't answer for the consequences. I shall do something dreadful!"

She advanced threateningly toward him, and while she was raving, as became a good courtesan who, though driven to desperation, was yet firmly convinced of her rights and her superiority over tiresome, honest folks, the door opened suddenly and Steiner presented himself. That proved the finishing touch. She shrieked aloud:

"Well, I never. Here's the other one!"

Bewildered by her piercing outcry, Steiner stopped short. Muffat's unexpected presence annoyed him, for he feared an explanation and had been doing his best to avoid it these three months past. With blinking eyes he stood first on one leg, then on the other, looking embarrassed the while and avoiding the count's gaze. He was out of breath, and as became a man who had rushed across Paris with good news, only to find himself involved in unforeseen trouble, his face was flushed and distorted.

"Que veux-tu, toi?" asked Nana roughly, using the second person singular in open mockery of the count.

"What—what do I——" he stammered. "I've got it for you—you know what." "Eh?"

He hesitated. The day before yesterday she had given him to understand that if he could not find her a thousand francs to pay a bill with she would not receive him any more. For two days he had been loafing about the town in quest of the money and had at last made the sum up that very morning.

"The thousand francs!" he ended by declaring as he drew an envelope from his pocket.

Nana had not remembered.

"The thousand francs!" she cried. "D'you think I'm begging alms? Now look here, that's what I value your thousand francs at!"

And snatching the envelope, she threw it full in his face. As became a prudent Hebrew, he picked it up slowly and painfully and then looked at the young woman with a dull expression of face. Muffat and he exchanged a despairing glance, while she put her arms akimbo in order to shout more loudly than before.

"Come now, will you soon have done insulting me? I'm glad you've come,

too, dear boy, because now you see the clearance 'll be quite complete. Now then, gee up! Out you go!"

Then as they did not hurry in the least, for they were paralyzed:

"D'you mean to say I'm acting like a fool, eh? It's likely enough! But you've bored me too much! And, hang it all, I've had enough of swelldom! If I die of what I'm doing—well, it's my fancy!"

They sought to calm her; they begged her to listen to reason.

"Now then, once, twice, thrice! Won't you go? Very well! Look there! I've got company."

And with a brisk movement she flung wide the bedroom door. Whereupon in the middle of the tumbled bed the two men caught sight of Fontan. He had not expected to be shown off in this situation; nevertheless, he took things very easily, for he was used to sudden surprises on the stage. Indeed, after the first shock he even hit upon a grimace calculated to tide him honorably over his difficulty; he "turned rabbit," as he phrased it, and stuck out his lips and wrinkled up his nose, so as completely to transform the lower half of his face. His base, satyrlike head seemed to exude incontinence. It was this man Fontan then whom Nana had been to fetch at the Variétés every day for a week past, for she was smitten with that fierce sort of passion which the grimacing ugliness of a low comedian is wont to inspire in the genus courtesan.

"There!" she said, pointing him out with tragic gesture.

Muffat, who hitherto had pocketed everything, rebelled at this affront.

"Bitch!" he stammered.

But Nana, who was once more in the bedroom, came back in order to have the last word.

"How am I a bitch? What about your wife?"

And she was off and, slamming the door with a bang, she noisily pushed to the bolt. Left alone, the two men gazed at one another in silence. Zoé had just come into the room, but she did not drive them out. Nay, she spoke to them in the most sensible manner. As became a woman with a head on her shoulders, she decided that Madame's conduct was rather too much of a good thing. But she defended her, nonetheless: this union with the play actor couldn't last; the madness must be allowed to pass off! The two men retired without uttering a sound. On the pavement outside they shook hands silently, as though swayed by a mutual sense of fraternity. Then they turned their backs on one another and went crawling off in opposite directions.

When at last Muffat entered his town house in the Rue Miromesnil his wife was just arriving. The two met on the great staircase, whose walls exhaled an icy chill. They lifted up their eyes and beheld one another. The count still wore his muddy clothes, and his pale, bewildered face betrayed the prodigal returning from his debauch. The countess looked as though she were utterly fagged out by a night in the train. She was dropping with sleep, but her hair had been brushed anyhow, and her eyes were deeply sunken.

CHAPTER VIII

WE ARE in a little set of lodgings on the fourth floor in the Rue Véron at Montmartre. Nana and Fontan have invited a few friends to cut their Twelfth-Night cake with them. They are giving their housewarming, though they have been only three days settled.

They had no fixed intention of keeping house together, but the whole thing had come about suddenly in the first glow of the honeymoon. After her grand blowup, when she had turned the count and the banker so vigorously out of doors, Nana felt the world crumbling about her feet. She estimated the situation at a glance; the creditors would swoop down on her anteroom, would mix themselves up with her love affairs and threaten to sell her little all unless she continued to act sensibly. Then, too, there would be no end of disputes and carking anxieties if she attempted to save her furniture from their clutches. And so she preferred giving up everything. Besides, the flat in the Boulevard Haussmann was plaguing her to death. It was so stupid with its great gilded rooms! In her access of tenderness for Fontan she began dreaming of a pretty little bright chamber. Indeed, she returned to the old ideals of the florist days, when her highest ambition was to have a rosewood cupboard with a plate-glass door and a bed hung with blue "reps." In the course of two days she sold what she could smuggle out of the house in the way of knickknacks and jewelry and then disappeared, taking with her ten thousand francs and never even warning the porter's wife. It was a plunge into the dark, a merry spree; never a trace was left behind. In this way she would prevent the men from coming dangling after her. Fontan was very nice. He did not say no to anything but just let her do as she liked. Nay, he even displayed an admirable spirit of comradeship. He had, on his part, nearly seven thousand francs, and despite the fact that people accused him of stinginess, he consented to add them to the young woman's ten thousand. The sum struck them as a solid foundation on which to begin housekeeping. And so they started away, drawing from their common hoard, in order to hire and furnish the two rooms in the Rue Véron, and sharing everything together like old friends. In the early days it was really delicious.

On Twelfth Night Mme Lerat and Louiset were the first to arrive. As Fontan had not yet come home, the old lady ventured to give expression to her fears, for she trembled to see her niece renouncing the chance of wealth.

"Oh, Aunt, I love him so dearly!" cried Nana, pressing her hands to her heart with the prettiest of gestures.

This phrase produced an extraordinary effect on Mme Lerat, and tears came into her eyes.

"That's true," she said with an air of conviction. "Love before all things!"

And with that she went into raptures over the prettiness of the rooms. Nana took her to see the bedroom, the parlor and the very kitchen. Gracious goodness, it wasn't a vast place, but then, they had painted it afresh and put up

new wallpapers. Besides, the sun shone merrily into it during the daytime.

Thereupon Mme Lerat detained the young woman in the bedroom, while Louiset installed himself behind the charwoman in the kitchen in order to watch a chicken being roasted. If, said Mme Lerat, she permitted herself to say what was in her mind, it was because Zoé had just been at her house. Zoé had stayed courageously in the breach because she was devoted to her mistress. Madame would pay her later on; she was in no anxiety about that! And amid the breakup of the Boulevard Haussmann establishment it was she who showed the creditors a bold front; it was she who conducted a dignified retreat, saving what she could from the wreck and telling everyone that her mistress was traveling. She never once gave them her address. Nay, through fear of being followed, she even deprived herself of the pleasure of calling on Madame. Nevertheless, that same morning she had run round to Mme Lerat's because matters were taking a new turn. The evening before creditors in the persons of the upholsterer, the charcoal merchant and the laundress had put in an appearance and had offered to give Madame an extension of time. Nay, they had even proposed to advance Madame a very considerable amount if only Madame would return to her flat and conduct herself like a sensible person. The aunt repeated Zoé's words. Without doubt there was a gentleman behind it all.

"I'll never consent!" declared Nana in great disgust. "Ah, they're a pretty lot those tradesmen! Do they think I'm to be sold so that they can get their bills paid? Why, look here, I'd rather die of hunger than deceive Fontan."

"That's what I said," averred Mme Lerat. "'My niece,' I said, 'is too noble-hearted!'"

Nana, however, was much vexed to learn that La Mignotte was being sold and that Labordette was buying it for Caroline Héquet at an absurdly low price. It made her angry with that clique. Oh, they were a regular cheap lot, in spite of their airs and graces! Yes, by Jove, she was worth more than the whole lot of them!

"They can have their little joke out," she concluded, "but money will never give them true happiness! Besides, you know, Aunt, I don't even know now whether all that set are alive or not. I'm much too happy."

At that very moment Mme Maloir entered, wearing one of those hats of which she alone understood the shape. It was delightful meeting again. Mme Maloir explained that magnificence frightened her and that *now*, from time to time, she would come back for her game of bezique. A second visit was paid to the different rooms in the lodgings, and in the kitchen Nana talked of economy in the presence of the charwoman, who was basting the fowl, and said that a servant would have cost too much and that she was herself desirous of looking after things. Louiset was gazing beatifically at the roasting process.

But presently there was a loud outburst of voices. Fontan had come in with Bosc and Prullière, and the company could now sit down to table. The soup had been already served when Nana for the third time showed off the lodgings.

"Ah, dear children, how comfortable you are here!" Bosc kept repeating, simply for the sake of pleasing the chums who were standing the dinner.

At bottom the subject of the "nook," as he called it, nowise touched him.

In the bedroom he harped still more vigorously on the amiable note. Ordinarily he was wont to treat women like cattle, and the idea of a man bothering himself about one of the dirty brutes excited within him the only angry feelings of which, in his comprehensive, drunken disdain of the universe, he was still capable.

"Ah, ah, the villains," he continued with a wink, "they've done this on the sly. Well, you were certainly right. It will be charming, and, by heaven, we'll come and see you!"

But when Louiset arrived on the scene astride upon a broomstick, Prullière chuckled spitefully and remarked:

"Well, I never! You've got a baby already?"

This struck everybody as very droll, and Mme Lerat and Mme Maloir shook with laughter. Nana, far from being vexed, laughed tenderly and said that unfortunately this was not the case. She would very much have liked it, both for the little one's sake and for her own, but perhaps one would arrive all the same. Fontan, in his role of honest citizen, took Louiset in his arms and began playing with him and lisping.

"Never mind! It loves its daddy! Call me 'Papa,' you little blackguard!"

"Papa, Papa!" stammered the child.

The company overwhelmed him with caresses, but Bosc was bored and talked of sitting down to table. That was the only serious business in life. Nana asked her guests' permission to put Louiset's chair next her own. The dinner was very merry, but Bosc suffered from the near neighborhood of the child, from whom he had to defend his plate. Mme Lerat bored him too. She was in a melting mood and kept whispering to him all sorts of mysterious things about gentlemen of the first fashion who were still running after Nana. Twice he had to push away her knee, for she was positively invading him in her gushing, tearful mood. Prullière behaved with great incivility toward Mme Maloir and did not once help her to anything. He was entirely taken up with Nana and looked annoyed at seeing her with Fontan. Besides, the turtle doves were kissing so excessively as to be becoming positive bores. Contrary to all known rules, they had elected to sit side by side.

"Devil take it! Why don't you eat? You've got plenty of time ahead of you!" Bosc kept repeating with his mouth full. "Wait till we are gone!"

But Nana could not restrain herself. She was in a perfect ecstasy of love. Her face was as full of blushes as an innocent young girl's, and her looks and her laughter seemed to overflow with tenderness. Gazing on Fontan, she overwhelmed him with pet names—"my doggie, my old bear, my kitten"—and whenever he passed her the water or the salt she bent forward and kissed him at random on lips, eyes, nose or ear. Then if she met with reproof she would return to the attack with the cleverest maneuvers and with infinite submissiveness and the supple cunning of a beaten cat would catch hold of his hand when no one was looking, in order to kiss it again. It seemed she must be touching something belonging to him. As to Fontan, he gave himself airs and let himself be adored with the utmost condescension. His great nose sniffed

with entirely sensual content; his goat face, with its quaint, monstrous ugliness, positively glowed in the sunlight of devoted adoration lavished upon him by that superb woman who was so fair and so plump of limb. Occasionally he gave a kiss in return, as became a man who is having all the enjoyment and is yet willing to behave prettily.

"Well, you're growing maddening!" cried Prullière. "Get away from her, you fellow there!"

And he dismissed Fontan and changed covers, in order to take his place at Nana's side. The company shouted and applauded at this and gave vent to some stiffish epigrammatic witticisms. Fontan counterfeited despair and assumed the quaint expression of Vulcan crying for Venus. Straightway Prullière became very gallant, but Nana, whose foot he was groping for under the table, caught him a slap to make him keep quiet. No, no, she was certainly not going to become his mistress. A month ago she had begun to take a fancy to him because of his good looks, but now she detested him. If he pinched her again under pretense of picking up her napkin, she would throw her glass in his face!

Nevertheless, the evening passed off well. The company had naturally begun talking about the Variétés. Wasn't that cad of a Bordenave going to go off the hooks after all? His nasty diseases kept reappearing and causing him such suffering that you couldn't come within six yards of him nowadays. The day before during rehearsal he had been incessantly yelling at Simonne. There was a fellow whom the theatrical people wouldn't shed many tears over. Nana announced that if he were to ask her to take another part she would jolly well send him to the rightabout. Moreover, she began talking of leaving the stage; the theater was not to compare with her home. Fontan, who was not in the present piece or in that which was then being rehearsed, also talked big about the joy of being entirely at liberty and of passing his evenings with his feet on the fender in the society of his little pet. And at this the rest exclaimed delightedly, treating their entertainers as lucky people and pretending to envy their felicity.

The Twelfth-Night cake had been cut and handed round. The bean had fallen to the lot of Mme Lerat, who popped it into Bosc's glass. Whereupon there were shouts of "The king drinks! The king drinks!" Nana took advantage of this outburst of merriment and went and put her arms round Fontan's neck again, kissing him and whispering in his ear. But Prullière, laughing angrily, as became a pretty man, declared that they were not playing the game. Louiset, meanwhile, slept soundly on two chairs. It was nearing one o'clock when the company separated, shouting *au revoir* as they went downstairs.

For three weeks the existence of the pair of lovers was really charming. Nana fancied she was returning to those early days when her first silk dress had caused her infinite delight. She went out little and affected a life of solitude and simplicity. One morning early, when she had gone down to buy fish *in propria persona* in La Rouchefoucauld Market, she was vastly surprised to meet her old hair dresser Francis face to face. His getup was as scrupulously careful as ever: he wore the finest linen, and his frock coat was beyond reproach; in fact, Nana felt ashamed that he should see her in the street with a dressing

jacket and disordered hair and down-at-heel shoes. But he had the tact, if possible, to intensify his politeness toward her. He did not permit himself a single inquiry and affected to believe that Madame was at present on her travels. Ah, but Madame had rendered many persons unhappy when she decided to travel! All the world had suffered loss. The young woman, however, ended by asking him questions, for a sudden fit of curiosity had made her forget her previous embarrassment. Seeing that the crowd was jostling them, she pushed him into a doorway and, still holding her little basket in one hand, stood chatting in front of him. What were people saying about her high jinks? Good heavens! The ladies to whom he went said this and that and all sorts of things. In fact, she had made a great noise and was enjoying a real boom: And Steiner? M. Steiner was in a very bad way, would make an ugly finish if he couldn't hit on some new commercial operation. And Daguenet? Oh, *he* was getting on swimmingly. M. Daguenet was settling down. Nana, under the exciting influence of various recollections, was just opening her mouth with a view to a further examination when she felt it would be awkward to utter Muffat's name. Thereupon Francis smiled and spoke instead of *her*. As to Monsieur le Comte, it was all a great pity, so sad had been his sufferings since Madame's departure.

He had been like a soul in pain—you might have met him wherever Madame was likely to be found. At last M. Mignon had come across him and had taken him home to his own place. This piece of news caused Nana to laugh a good deal. But her laughter was not of the easiest kind.

"Ah, he's with Rose now," she said. "Well then, you must know, Francis, I've done with him! Oh, the canting thing! It's learned some pretty habits—can't even go fasting for a week now! And to think that he used to swear he wouldn't have any woman after me!"

She was raging inwardly.

"My leavings, if you please!" she continued. "A pretty Johnnie for Rose to go and treat herself to! Oh, I understand it all now: she wanted to have her revenge because I got that brute of a Steiner away from her. Ain't it sly to get a man to come to her when I've chucked him out of doors?"

"M. Mignon doesn't tell that tale," said the hairdresser. "According to his account, it was Monsieur le Comte who chucked you out. Yes, and in a pretty disgusting way too—with a kick on the bottom!"

Nana became suddenly very pale.

"Eh, what?" she cried. "With a kick on my bottom? He's going too far, he is! Look here, my little friend, it was I who threw him downstairs, the cuckold, for he is a cuckold, I must inform you. His countess is making him one with every man she meets—yes, even with that good-for-nothing of a Fauchery. And that Mignon, who goes loafing about the pavement in behalf of his haridan of a wife, whom nobody wants because she's so lean! What a foul lot! What a foul lot!"

She was choking, and she paused for breath.

"Oh, that's what they say, is it? Very well, my little Francis, I'll go and look 'em up, I will. Shall you and I go to them at once? Yes, I'll go, and we'll see

whether they will have the cheek to go telling about kicks on the bottom. Kicks! I never took one from anybody! And nobody's ever going to strike me—d'ye see?—for I'd smash the man who laid a finger on me!"

Nevertheless, the storm subsided at last. After all, they might jolly well say what they liked! She looked upon them as so much filth underfoot! It would have soiled her to bother about people like that. She had a conscience of her own, she had! And Francis, seeing her thus giving herself away, what with her housewife's costume and all, became familiar and, at parting, made so bold as to give her some good advice. It was wrong of her to be sacrificing everything for the sake of an infatuation; such infatuations ruined existence. She listened to him with bowed head while he spoke to her with a pained expression, as became a connoisseur who could not bear to see so fine a girl making such a hash of things.

"Well, that's my affair," she said at last. "Thanks all the same, dear boy."

She shook his hand, which despite his perfect dress was always a little greasy, and then went off to buy her fish. During the day that story about the kick on the bottom occupied her thoughts. She even spoke about it to Fontan and again posed as a sturdy woman who was not going to stand the slightest flick from anybody. Fontan, as became a philosophic spirit, declared that all men of fashion were beasts whom it was one's duty to despise. And from that moment forth Nana was full of very real disdain.

That same evening they went to the Bouffes-Parisiens Théâtre to see a little woman of Fontan's acquaintance make her debut in a part of some ten lines. It was close on one o'clock when they once more trudged up the heights of Montmartre. They had purchased a cake, a "mocha," in the Rue de la Chaussée-d'Antin, and they ate it in bed, seeing that the night was not warm and it was not worth while lighting a fire. Sitting up side by side, with the bedclothes pulled up in front and the pillows piled up behind, they supped and talked about the little woman. Nana thought her plain and lacking in style. Fontan, lying on his stomach, passed up the pieces of cake which had been put between the candle and the matches on the edge of the night table. But they ended by quarreling.

"Oh, just to think of it!" cried Nana. "She's got eyes like gimlet holes, and her hair's the color of tow."

"Hold your tongue, do!" said Fontan. "She has a superb head of hair and such fire in her looks! It's lovely the way you women always tear each other to pieces!"

He looked annoyed.

"Come now, we've had enough of it!" he said at last in savage tones. "You know I don't like being bored. Let's go to sleep, or things'll take a nasty turn."

And he blew out the candle, but Nana was furious and went on talking. She was not going to be spoken to in that voice; she was accustomed to being treated with respect! As he did not vouchsafe any further answer, she was silenced, but she could not go to sleep and lay tossing to and fro.

"Great God, have you done moving about?" cried he suddenly, giving a brisk jump upward.

"It isn't my fault if there are crumbs in the bed," she said curtly.

In fact, there were crumbs in the bed. She felt them down to her middle; she was everywhere devoured by them. One single crumb was scorching her and making her scratch herself till she bled. Besides, when one eats a cake isn't it usual to shake out the bedclothes afterward? Fontan, white with rage, had relit the candle, and they both got up and, barefooted and in their night-dresses, they turned down the clothes and swept up the crumbs on the sheet with their hands. Fontan went to bed again, shivering, and told her to go to the devil when she advised him to wipe the soles of his feet carefully. And in the end she came back to her old position, but scarce had she stretched herself out than she danced again. There were fresh crumbs in the bed!

"By Jove, it was sure to happen!" she cried. "You've brought them back again under your feet. I can't go on like this! No, I tell you, I can't go on like this!"

And with that she was on the point of stepping over him in order to jump out of bed again, when Fontan in his longing for sleep grew desperate and dealt her a ringing box on the ear. The blow was so smart that Nana suddenly found herself lying down again with her head on the pillow.

She lay half stunned.

"Oh!" she ejaculated simply, sighing a child's big sigh.

For a second or two he threatened her with a second slap, asking her at the same time if she meant to move again. Then he put out the light, settled himself squarely on his back and in a trice was snoring. But she buried her face in the pillow and began sobbing quietly to herself. It was cowardly of him to take advantage of his superior strength! She had experienced very real terror all the same, so terrible had that quaint mask of Fontan's become. And her anger began dwindling down as though the blow had calmed her. She began to feel respect toward him and accordingly squeezed herself against the wall in order to leave him as much room as possible. She even ended by going to sleep, her cheek tingling, her eyes full of tears and feeling so deliciously depressed and wearied and submissive that she no longer noticed the crumbs. When she woke up in the morning she was holding Fontan in her naked arms and pressing him tightly against her breast. He would never begin it again, eh? Never again? She loved him too dearly. Why, it was even nice to be beaten if he struck the blow!

After that night a new life began. For a mere trifle—a yes, a no—Fontan would deal her a blow. She grew accustomed to it and pocketed everything. Sometimes she shed tears and threatened him, but he would pin her up against the wall and talk of strangling her, which had the effect of rendering her extremely obedient. As often as not, she sank down on a chair and sobbed for five minutes on end. But afterward she would forget all about it, grow very merry, fill the little lodgings with the sound of song and laughter and the rapid rustle of skirts. The worst of it was that Fontan was now in the habit of disappearing for the whole day and never returning home before midnight, for he was going to cafés and meeting his old friends again. Nana bore with everything. She was tremulous and caressing, her only fear being that she

might never see him again if she reproached him. But on certain days, when she had neither Mme Maloir nor her aunt and Louiset with her, she grew mortally dull. Thus one Sunday, when she was bargaining for some pigeons at La Rochefoucauld Market, she was delighted to meet Satin, who, in her turn, was busy purchasing a bunch of radishes. Since the evening when the prince had drunk Fontan's champagne they had lost sight of one another.

"What? It's you! D'you live in our parts?" said Satin, astounded at seeing her in the street at that hour of the morning and in slippers too. "Oh, my poor, dear girl, you're really ruined then!"

Nana knitted her brows as a sign that she was to hold her tongue, for they were surrounded by other women who wore dressing gowns and were without linen, while their disheveled tresses were white with fluff. In the morning, when the man picked up overnight had been newly dismissed, all the courtesans of the quarter were wont to come marketing here, their eyes heavy with sleep, their feet in old down-at-heel shoes and themselves full of the weariness and ill humor entailed by a night of boredom. From the four converging streets they came down into the market, looking still rather young in some cases and very pale and charming in their utter unconstraint; in others, hideous and old, with bloated faces and peeling skin. The latter did not the least mind being seen thus outside working hours, and not one of them deigned to smile when the passers-by on the sidewalk turned round to look at them. Indeed, they were all very full of business and wore a disdainful expression, as became good housewives for whom men had ceased to exist. Just as Satin, for instance, was paying for her bunch of radishes a young man, who might have been a shop-boy going late to his work, threw her a passing greeting:

"Good morning, duckie."

She straightened herself up at once and with the dignified manner becoming an offended queen remarked:

"What's up with that swine there?"

Then she fancied she recognized him. Three days ago toward midnight, as she was coming back alone from the boulevards, she had talked to him at the corner of the Rue Labruyère for nearly half an hour, with a view to persuading him to come home with her. But this recollection only angered her the more.

"Fancy they're brutes enough to shout things to you in broad daylight!" she continued. "When one's out on business one ought to be respectfully treated, eh?"

Nana had ended by buying her pigeons, although she certainly had her doubts of their freshness. After which Satin wanted to show her where she lived in the Rue Rochefoucauld close by. And the moment they were alone Nana told her of her passion for Fontan. Arrived in front of the house, the girl stopped with her bundle of radishes under her arm and listened eagerly to a final detail which the other imparted to her. Nana fibbed away and vowed that it was she who had turned Count Muffat out of doors with a perfect hail of kicks on the posterior.

"Oh, how smart!" Satin repeated. "How very smart! Kicks, eh? And he

never said a word, did he? What a blooming coward! I wish I'd been there to see his ugly mug! My dear girl, you were quite right. A pin for the coin! When I'm on with a mash I starve for it! You'll come and see me, eh? You promise? It's the left-hand door. Knock three knocks, for there's a whole heap of damned squints about."

After that whenever Nana grew too weary of life she went down and saw Satin. She was always sure of finding her, for the girl never went out before six in the evening. Satin occupied a couple of rooms which a chemist had furnished for her in order to save her from the clutches of the police, but in little more than a twelvemonth she had broken the furniture, knocked in the chairs, dirtied the curtains, and that in a manner so furiously filthy and untidy that the lodgings seemed as though inhabited by a pack of mad cats. On the mornings when she grew disgusted with herself and thought about cleaning up a bit, chair rails and strips of curtain would come off in her hands during her struggle with superincumbent dirt. On such days the place was fouler than ever, and it was impossible to enter it, owing to the things which had fallen down across the doorway. At length she ended by leaving her house severely alone. When the lamp was lit the cupboard with plate-glass doors, the clock and what remained of the curtains still served to impose on the men. Besides, for six months past her landlord had been threatening to evict her. Well then, for whom should she be keeping the furniture nice? For him more than anyone else, perhaps! And so whenever she got up in a merry mood she would shout "Gee up!" and give the sides of the cupboard and the chest of drawers such a tremendous kick that they cracked again.

Nana nearly always found her in bed. Even on the days when Satin went out to do her marketing she felt so tired on her return upstairs that she flung herself down on the bed and went to sleep again. During the day she dragged herself about and dozed off on chairs. Indeed, she did not emerge from this languid condition till the evening drew on and the gas was lit outside. Nana felt very comfortable at Satin's, sitting doing nothing on the untidy bed, while basins stood about on the floor at her feet and petticoats which had been bemired last night hung over the backs of armchairs and stained them with mud. They had long gossips together and were endlessly confidential, while Satin lay on her stomach in her nightgown, waving her legs above her head and smoking cigarettes as she listened. Sometimes on such afternoons as they had troubles to retail they treated themselves to absinthe in order, as they termed it, "to forget." Satin did not go downstairs or put on a petticoat but simply went and leaned over the banisters and shouted her order to the portress's little girl, a chit of ten, who when she brought up the absinthe in a glass would look furtively at the lady's bare legs. Every conversation led up to one subject—the beastliness of the men. Nana was overpowering on the subject of Fontan. She could not say a dozen words without lapsing into endless repetitions of his sayings and his doings. But Satin, like a good-natured girl, would listen unwearyingly to everlasting accounts of how Nana had watched for him at the window, how they had fallen out over a burnt dish of hash and how they had made it up in bed after hours of silent sulking. In her desire to be

always talking about these things Nana had got to tell of every slap that he dealt her. Last week he had given her a swollen eye; nay, the night before he had given her such a box on the ear as to throw her across the night table, and all because he could not find his slippers. And the other woman did not evince any astonishment but blew out cigarette smoke and only paused a moment to remark that, for her part, she always ducked under, which sent the gentleman pretty nearly sprawling. Both of them settled down with a will to these anecdotes about blows; they grew supremely happy and excited over these same idiotic doings about which they told one another a hundred times or more, while they gave themselves up to the soft and pleasing sense of weariness which was sure to follow the drubbings they talked of. It was the delight of rediscussing Fontan's blows and of explaining his works and his ways, down to the very manner in which he took off his boots, which brought Nana back daily to Satin's place. The latter, moreover, used to end by growing sympathetic in her turn and would cite even more violent cases, as, for instance, that of a pastry cook who had left her for dead on the floor. Yet she loved him, in spite of it all! Then came the days on which Nana cried and declared that things could not go on as they were doing. Satin would escort her back to her own door and would linger an hour out in the street to see that he did not murder her. And the next day the two women would rejoice over the reconciliation the whole afternoon through. Yet though they did not say so, they preferred the days when threshings were, so to speak, in the air, for then their comfortable indignation was all the stronger.

They became inseparable. Yet Satin never went to Nana's, Fontan having announced that he would have no trollops in his house. They used to go out together, and thus it was that Satin one day took her friend to see another woman. This woman turned out to be that very Mme Robert who had interested Nana and inspired her with a certain respect ever since she had refused to come to her supper. Mme Robert lived in the Rue Mosnier, a silent, new street in the Quartier de l'Europe, where there were no shops, and the handsome houses with their small, limited flats were peopled by ladies. It was five o'clock, and along the silent pavements in the quiet, aristocratic shelter of the tall white houses were drawn up the broughams of stock-exchange people and merchants, while men walked hastily about, looking up at the windows, where women in dressing jackets seemed to be awaiting them. At first Nana refused to go up, remarking with some constraint that she had not the pleasure of the lady's acquaintance. But Satin would take no refusal. She was only desirous of paying a civil call, for Mme Robert, whom she had met in a restaurant the day before, had made herself extremely agreeable and had got her to promise to come and see her. And at last Nana consented. At the top of the stairs a little drowsy maid informed them that Madame had not come home yet, but she ushered them into the drawing room notwithstanding and left them there.

"The deuce, it's a smart show!" whispered Satin. It was a stiff, middle-class room, hung with dark-colored fabrics, and suggested the conventional taste of a Parisian shopkeeper who has retired on his fortune. Nana was struck and

did her best to make merry about it. But Satin showed annoyance and spoke up for Mme Robert's strict adherence to the proprieties. She was always to be met in the society of elderly, grave-looking men, on whose arms she leaned. At present she had a retired chocolate seller in tow, a serious soul. Whenever he came to see her he was so charmed by the solid, handsome way in which the house was arranged that he had himself announced and addressed its mistress as "dear child."

"Look, here she is!" continued Satin, pointing to a photograph which stood in front of the clock. Nana scrutinized the portrait for a second or so. It represented a very dark brunette with a longish face and lips pursed up in a discreet smile. "A thoroughly fashionable lady," one might have said of the likeness, "but one who is rather more reserved than the rest."

"It's strange," murmured Nana at length, "but I've certainly seen that face somewhere. Where, I don't remember. But it can't have been in a pretty place—oh no, I'm sure it wasn't in a pretty place."

And turning toward her friend, she added, "So she's made you promise to come and see her? What does she want with you?"

"What does she want with me? 'Gad! To talk, I expect—to be with me a bit. It's her politeness."

Nana looked steadily at Satin. "Tut, tut," she said softly. After all, it didn't matter to her! Yet seeing that the lady was keeping them waiting, she declared that she would not stay longer, and accordingly they both took their departure.

The next day Fontan informed Nana that he was not coming home to dinner, and she went down early to find Satin with a view to treating her at a restaurant. The choice of the restaurant involved infinite debate. Satin proposed various brewery bars, which Nana thought detestable, and at last persuaded her to dine at Laure's. This was a table d'hôte in the Rue des Martyrs, where the dinner cost three francs.

Tired of waiting for the dinner hour and not knowing what to do out in the street, the pair went up to Laure's twenty minutes too early. The three dining rooms there were still empty, and they sat down at a table in the very saloon where Laure Piédefer was enthroned on a high bench behind a bar. This Laure was a lady of some fifty summers, whose swelling contours were tightly laced by belts and corsets. Women kept entering in quick procession, and each, in passing, craned upward so as to overtop the saucers raised on the counter and kissed Laure on the mouth with tender familiarity, while the monstrous creature tried, with tears in her eyes, to divide her attentions among them in such a way as to make no one jealous. On the other hand, the servant who waited on the ladies was a tall, lean woman. She seemed wasted with disease, and her eyes were ringed with dark lines and glowed with somber fire. Very rapidly the three saloons filled up. There were some hundred customers, and they had seated themselves wherever they could find vacant places. The majority were nearing the age of forty: their flesh was puffy and so bloated by vice as almost to hide the outlines of their flaccid mouths. But amid all these gross bosoms and figures some slim, pretty girls were observable.

These still wore a modest expression despite their impudent gestures, for they were only beginners in their art, who had started life in the ballrooms of the slums and had been brought to Laure's by some customer or other. Here the tribe of bloated women, excited by the sweet scent of their youth, jostled one another and, while treating them to dainties, formed a perfect court round them, much as old amorous bachelors might have done. As to the men, they were not numerous. There were ten or fifteen of them at the outside, and if we except four tall fellows who had come to see the sight and were cracking jokes and taking things easy, they behaved humbly enough amid this overwhelming flood of petticoats.

"I say, their stew's very good, ain't it?" said Satin.

Nana nodded with much satisfaction. It was the old substantial dinner you get in a country hotel and consisted of *vol-au-vent à la financière*, fowl boiled in rice, beans with a sauce and vanilla creams, iced and flavored with burnt sugar. The ladies made an especial onslaught on the boiled fowl and rice: their stays seemed about to burst; they wiped their lips with slow, luxurious movements. At first Nana had been afraid of meeting old friends who might have asked her silly questions, but she grew calm at last, for she recognized no one she knew among that extremely motley throng, where faded dresses and lamentable hats contrasted strangely with handsome costumes, the wearers of which fraternized in vice with their shabbier neighbors. She was momentarily interested, however, at the sight of a young man with short curly hair and insolent face who kept a whole tableful of vastly fat women breathlessly attentive to his slightest caprice. But when the young man began to laugh his bosom swelled.

"Good lack, it's a woman!"

She let a little cry escape as she spoke, and Satin, who was stuffing herself with boiled fowl, lifted up her head and whispered:

"Oh yes! I know her. A smart lot, eh? They do just fight for her."

Nana pouted disgustingly. She could not understand the thing as yet. Nevertheless, she remarked in her sensible tone that there was no disputing about tastes or colors, for you never could tell what you yourself might one day have a liking for. So she ate her cream with an air of philosophy, though she was perfectly well aware that Satin with her great blue virginal eyes was throwing the neighboring tables into a state of great excitement. There was one woman in particular, a powerful, fair-haired person who sat close to her and made herself extremely agreeable. She seemed all aglow with affection and pushed toward the girl so eagerly that Nana was on the point of interfering.

But at that very moment a woman who was entering the room gave her a shock of surprise. Indeed, she had recognized Mme Robert. The latter, looking, as was her wont, like a pretty brown mouse, nodded familiarly to the tall, lean serving maid and came and leaned upon Laure's counter. Then both women exchanged a long kiss. Nana thought such an attention on the part of a woman so distinguished looking very amusing, the more so because Mme Robert had quite altered her usual modest expression. On the contrary, her eye roved about the saloon as she kept up a whispered conversation. Laure

had resumed her seat and once more settled herself down with all the majesty of an old image of Vice, whose face has been worn and polished by the kisses of the faithful. Above the range of loaded plates she sat enthroned in all the opulence which a hotelkeeper enjoys after forty years of activity, and as she sat there she swayed her bloated following of large women, in comparison with the biggest of whom she seemed monstrous.

But Mme Robert had caught sight of Satin, and leaving Laure, she ran up and behaved charmingly, telling her how much she regretted not having been at home the day before. When Satin, however, who was ravished at this treatment, insisted on finding room for her at the table, she vowed she had already dined. She had simply come up to look about her. As she stood talking behind her new friend's chair she leaned lightly on her shoulders and in a smiling, coaxing manner remarked:

"Now when shall I see you? If you were free——"

Nana unluckily failed to hear more. The conversation vexed her, and she was dying to tell this honest lady a few home truths. But the sight of a troop of new arrivals paralyzed her. It was composed of smart, fashionably dressed women who were wearing their diamonds. Under the influence of perverse impulse they had made up a party to come to Laure's—whom, by the by, they all treated with great familiarity—to eat the three-franc dinner while flashing their jewels of great price in the jealous and astonished eyes of poor, bedraggled prostitutes. The moment they entered, talking and laughing in their shrill, clear tones and seeming to bring sunshine with them from the outside world, Nana turned her head rapidly away. Much to her annoyance she had recognized Lucy Stewart and Maria Blond among them, and for nearly five minutes, during which the ladies chatted with Laure before passing into the saloon beyond, she kept her head down and seemed deeply occupied in rolling bread pills on the cloth in front of her. But when at length she was able to look round, what was her astonishment to observe the chair next to hers vacant! Satin had vanished.

"Gracious, where can she be?" she loudly ejaculated.

The sturdy, fair woman who had been overwhelming Satin with civil attentions laughed ill-temperedly, and when Nana, whom the laugh irritated, looked threatening she remarked in a soft, drawling way:

"It's certainly not me that's done you this turn; it's the other one!"

Thereupon Nana understood that they would most likely make game of her and so said nothing more. She even kept her seat for some moments, as she did not wish to show how angry she felt. She could hear Lucy Stewart laughing at the end of the next saloon, where she was treating a whole table of little women who had come from the public balls at Montmartre and La Chapelle. It was very hot; the servant was carrying away piles of dirty plates with a strong scent of boiled fowl and rice, while the four gentlemen had ended by regaling quite half a dozen couples with capital wine in the hope of making them tipsy and hearing some pretty stiffish things. What at present most exasperated Nana was the thought of paying for Satin's dinner. There was a wench for you, who allowed herself to be amused and then made off

with never a thank-you in company with the first petticoat that came by! Without doubt it was only a matter of three francs, but she felt it was hard lines all the same—her way of doing it was too disgusting. Nevertheless, she paid up, throwing the six francs at Laure, whom at the moment she despised more than the mud in the street. In the Rue des Martyrs Nana felt her bitterness increasing. She was certainly not going to run after Satin! It was a nice filthy business for one to be poking one's nose into! But her evening was spoiled, and she walked slowly up again toward Montmartre, raging against Mme Robert in particular. Gracious goodness, that woman had a fine cheek to go playing the lady—yes, the lady in the dustbin! She now felt sure she had met her at the Papillon, a wretched public-house ball in the Rue des Poissonniers, where men conquered her scruples for thirty sous. And to think a thing like that got hold of important functionaries with her modest looks! And to think she refused suppers to which one did her the honor of inviting her because, forsooth, she was playing the virtuous game! Oh yes, she'd get virtued! It was always those conceited prudes who went the most fearful lengths in low corners nobody knew anything about.

Revolving these matters, Nana at length reached her home in the Rue Véron and was taken aback on observing a light in the window. Fontan had come home in a sulk, for he, too, had been deserted by the friend who had been dining with him. He listened coldly to her explanations while she trembled lest he should strike her. It scared her to find him at home, seeing that she had not expected him before one in the morning, and she told him a fib and confessed that she had certainly spent six francs, but in Mme Maloir's society. He was not ruffled, however, and he handed her a letter which, though addressed to her, he had quietly opened. It was a letter from Georges, who was still a prisoner at Les Fondettes and comforted himself weekly with the composition of glowing pages. Nana loved to be written to, especially when the letters were full of grand, loverlike expressions with a sprinkling of vows. She used to read them to everybody. Fontan was familiar with the style employed by Georges and appreciated it. But that evening she was so afraid of a scene that she affected complete indifference, skimming through the letter with a sulky expression and flinging it aside as soon as read. Fontan had begun beating a tattoo on a windowpane; the thought of going to bed so early bored him, and yet he did not know how to employ his evening. He turned briskly round:

"Suppose we answer that young vagabond at once," he said.

It was the custom for him to write the letters in reply. He was wont to vie with the other in point of style. Then, too, he used to be delighted when Nana, grown enthusiastic after the letter had been read over aloud, would kiss him with the announcement that nobody but he could "say things like that." Thus their latent affections would be stirred, and they would end with mutual adoration.

"As you will," she replied. "I'll make tea, and we'll go to bed after."

Thereupon Fontan installed himself at the table on which pen, ink and paper were at the same time grandly displayed. He curved his arm; he drew a long face.

"My heart's own," he began aloud.

And for more than an hour he applied himself to his task, polishing here, weighing a phrase there, while he sat with his head between his hands and laughed inwardly whenever he hit upon a peculiarly tender expression. Nana had already consumed two cups of tea in silence, when at last he read out the letter in the level voice and with the two or three emphatic gestures peculiar to such performances on the stage. It was five pages long, and he spoke therein of "the delicious hours passed at La Mignotte, those hours of which the memory lingered like subtle perfume." He vowed "eternal fidelity to that springtide of love" and ended by declaring that his sole wish was to "recommence that happy time if, indeed, happiness can recommence."

"I say that out of politeness, y'know," he explained. "The moment it becomes laughable—ch, what! I think she's felt it, she has!"

He glowed with triumph. But Nana was unskillful; she still suspected an outbreak and now was mistaken enough not to fling her arms round his neck in a burst of admiration. She thought the letter a respectable performance, nothing more. Thereupon he was much annoyed. If his letter did not please her she might write another! And so instead of bursting out in loverlike speeches and exchanging kisses, as their wont was, they sat coldly facing one another at the table. Nevertheless, she poured him out a cup of tea.

"Here's a filthy mess," he cried after dipping his lips in the mixture. "You've put salt in it, you have!"

Nana was unlucky enough to shrug her shoulders, and at that he grew furious.

"Aha! Things are taking a wrong turn tonight!"

And with that the quarrel began. It was only ten by the clock, and this was a way of killing time. So he lashed himself into a rage and threw in Nana's teeth a whole string of insults and all kinds of accusations which followed one another so closely that she had no time to defend herself. She was dirty; she was stupid; she had knocked about in all sorts of low places! After that he waxed frantic over the money question. Did he spend six francs when he dined out? No, somebody was treating him to a dinner; otherwise he would have eaten his ordinary meal at home. And to think of spending them on that old procuress of a Maloir, a jade he would chuck out of the house tomorrow! Yes, by jingo, they would get into a nice mess if he and she were to go throwing six francs out of the window every day!

"Now to begin with, I want your accounts," he shouted. "Let's see; hand over the money! Now where do we stand?"

All his sordid avaricious instincts came to the surface. Nana was cowed and scared, and she made haste to fetch their remaining cash out of the desk and to bring it him. Up to that time the key had lain on this common treasury, from which they had drawn as freely as they wished.

"How's this?" he said when he had counted up the money. "There are scarcely seven thousand francs remaining out of seventeen thousand, and we've only been together three months. The thing's impossible."

He rushed forward, gave the desk a savage shake and brought the drawer

forward in order to ransack it in the light of the lamp. But it actually contained only six thousand eight hundred and odd francs. Thereupon the tempest burst forth.

"Ten thousand francs in three months!" he yelled. "By God! What have you done with it all? Eh? Answer! It all goes to your jade of an aunt, eh? Or you're keeping men; that's plain! Will you answer?"

"Oh well, if you must get in a rage!" said Nana. "Why, the calculation's easily made! You haven't allowed for the furniture; besides, I've had to buy linen. Money goes quickly when one's settling in a new place."

But while requiring explanations he refused to listen to them.

"Yes, it goes a deal too quickly!" he rejoined more calmly. "And look here, little girl, I've had enough of this mutual housekeeping. You know those seven thousand francs are mine. Yes, and as I've got 'em, I shall keep 'em! Hang it, the moment you become wasteful I get anxious not to be ruined. To each man his own."

And he pocketed the money in a lordly way while Nana gazed at him, dumfounded. He continued speaking complaisantly:

"You must understand I'm not such a fool as to keep aunts and likewise children who don't belong to me. You were pleased to spend your own money—well, that's your affair! But my money—no, that's sacred! When in the future you cook a leg of mutton I'll pay for half of it. We'll settle up tonight—there!"

Straightway Nana rebelled. She could not help shouting:

"Come, I say, it's you who've run through my ten thousand francs. It's a dirty trick, I tell you!"

But he did not stop to discuss matters further, for he dealt her a random box on the ear across the table, remarking as he did so:

"Let's have that again!"

She let him have it again despite his blow. Whereupon he fell upon her and kicked and cuffed her heartily. Soon he had reduced her to such a state that she ended, as her wont was, by undressing and going to bed in a flood of tears.

He was out of breath and was going to bed, in his turn, when he noticed the letter he had written to Georges lying on the table. Whereupon he folded it up carefully and, turning toward the bed, remarked in threatening accents:

"It's very well written, and I'm going to post it myself because I don't like women's fancies. Now don't go moaning any more; it puts my teeth on edge."

Nana, who was crying and gasping, thereupon held her breath. When he was in bed she choked with emotion and threw herself upon his breast with a wild burst of sobs. Their scuffles always ended thus, for she trembled at the thought of losing him and, like a coward, wanted always to feel that he belonged entirely to her, despite everything. Twice he pushed her magnificently away, but the warm embrace of this woman who was begging for mercy with great, tearful eyes, as some faithful brute might do, finally aroused desire. And he became royally condescending without, however, lowering his dignity before any of her advances. In fact, he let himself be caressed and taken by force, as became a man whose forgiveness is worth the trouble of winning. Then he was seized with anxiety, fearing that Nana was playing a part with a

view to regaining possession of the treasury key. The light had been extinguished when he felt it necessary to reaffirm his will and pleasure.

"You must know, my girl, that this is really very serious and that I keep the money."

Nana, who was falling asleep with her arms round his neck, uttered a sublime sentiment.

"Yes, you need fear nothing! I'll work for both of us!"

But from that evening onward their life in common became more and more difficult. From one week's end to the other the noise of slaps filled the air and resembled the ticking of a clock by which they regulated their existence. Through dint of being much beaten Nana became as pliable as fine linen; her skin grew delicate and pink and white and so soft to the touch and clear to the view that she may be said to have grown more good looking than ever. Prullière, moreover, began running after her like a madman, coming in when Fontan was away and pushing her into corners in order to snatch an embrace. But she used to struggle out of his grasp, full of indignation and blushing with shame. It disgusted her to think of him wanting to deceive a friend. Prullière would thereupon begin sneering with a wrathful expression. Why, she was growing jolly stupid nowadays! How could she take up with such an ape? For, indeed, Fontan was a regular ape with that great swingeing nose of his. Oh, he had an ugly mug! Besides, the man knocked her about too!

"It's possible I like him as he is," she one day made answer in the quiet voice peculiar to a woman who confesses to an abominable taste.

Bosc contented himself by dining with them as often as possible. He shrugged his shoulders behind Prullière's back—a pretty fellow, to be sure, but a frivolous! Bosc had on more than one occasion assisted at domestic scenes, and at dessert, when Fontan slapped Nana, he went on chewing solemnly, for the thing struck him as being quite in the course of nature. In order to give some return for his dinner he used always to go into ecstasies over their happiness. He declared himself a philosopher who had given up everything, glory included. At times Prullière and Fontan lolled back in their chairs, losing count of time in front of the empty table, while with theatrical gestures and intonation they discussed their former successes till two in the morning. But he would sit by, lost in thought, finishing the brandy bottle in silence and only occasionally emitting a little contemptuous sniff. Where was Talma's tradition? Nowhere. Very well, let them leave him jolly well alone! It was too stupid to go on as they were doing!

One evening he found Nana in tears. She took off her dressing jacket in order to show him her back and her arms, which were black and blue. He looked at her skin without being tempted to abuse the opportunity, as that ass of a Prullière would have been. Then, sententiously:

"My dear girl, where there are women there are sure to be ructions. It was Napoleon who said that, I think. Wash yourself with salt water. Salt water's the very thing for those little knocks. Tut, tut, you'll get others as bad, but don't complain so long as no bones are broken. I'm inviting myself to dinner, you know; I've spotted a leg of mutton."

But Mme Lerat had less philosophy. Every time Nana showed her a fresh bruise on the white skin she screamed aloud. They were killing her niece; things couldn't go on as they were doing. As a matter of fact, Fontan had turned Mme Lerat out of doors and had declared that he would not have her at his house in the future, and ever since that day, when he returned home and she happened to be there, she had to make off through the kitchen, which was a horrible humiliation to her. Accordingly she never ceased inveighing against that brutal individual. She especially blamed his ill breeding, pursing up her lips, as she did so, like a highly respectable lady whom nobody could possibly remonstrate with on the subject of good manners.

"Oh, you notice it at once," she used to tell Nana; "he hasn't the barest notion of the very smallest proprieties. His mother must have been common! Don't deny it—the thing's obvious! I don't speak on my own account, though a person of my years has a right to respectful treatment, but *you*—how do *you* manage to put up with his bad manners? For though I don't want to flatter myself, I've always taught you how to behave, and among our own people you always enjoyed the best possible advice. We were all very well bred in our family, weren't we now?"

Nana used never to protest but would listen with bowed head.

"Then, too," continued the aunt, "you've only known perfect gentlemen hitherto. We were talking of that very topic with Zoé at my place yesterday evening. She can't understand it any more than I can. 'How is it,' she said, 'that Madame, who used to have that perfect gentleman, Monsieur le Comte, at her beck and call—for between you and me, it seems you drove him silly—'how is it that Madame lets herself be made into mincemeat by that clown of a fellow?' I remarked at the time that you might put up with the beatings but that I would never have allowed him to be lacking in proper respect. In fact, there isn't a word to be said for him. I wouldn't have his portrait in my room even! And you ruin yourself for such a bird as that; yes, you ruin yourself, my darling; you toil and you moil, when there are so many others and such rich men, too, some of them even connected with the government! Ah well, it's not I who ought to be telling you this, of course! But all the same, when next he tries any of his dirty tricks on I should cut him short with a 'Monsieur, what d'you take me for?' You know how to say it in that grand way of yours! It would downright cripple him."

Thereupon Nana burst into sobs and stammered out:

"Oh, Aunt, I love him!"

The fact of the matter was that Mme Lerat was beginning to feel anxious at the painful way her niece doled out the sparse, occasional francs destined to pay for little Louis's board and lodging. Doubtless she was willing to make sacrifices and to keep the child by her whatever might happen while waiting for more prosperous times, but the thought that Fontan was preventing her and the brat and its mother from swimming in a sea of gold made her so savage that she was ready to deny the very existence of true love. Accordingly she ended up with the following severe remarks:

"Now listen, some fine day when he's taken the skin off your back, you'll come and knock at my door, and I'll open it to you."

Soon money began to engross Nana's whole attention. Fontan had caused the seven thousand francs to vanish away. Without doubt they were quite safe; indeed, she would never have dared ask him questions about them, for she was wont to be blushing diffident with that bird, as Mme Lerat called him. She trembled lest he should think her capable of quarreling with him about halfpence. He had certainly promised to subscribe toward their common household expenses, and in the early days he had given out three francs every morning. But he was as exacting as a boarder; he wanted everything for his three francs—butter, meat, early fruit and early vegetables—and if she ventured to make an observation, if she hinted that you could not have everything in the market for three francs, he flew into a temper and treated her as a useless, wasteful woman, a confounded donkey whom the tradespeople were robbing. Moreover, he was always ready to threaten that he would take lodgings somewhere else. At the end of a month on certain mornings he had forgotten to deposit the three francs on the chest of drawers, and she had ventured to ask for them in a timid, roundabout way. Whereupon there had been such bitter disputes and he had seized every pretext to render her life so miserable that she had found it best no longer to count upon him. Whenever, however, he had omitted to leave behind the three one-franc pieces and found a dinner awaiting him all the same, he grew as merry as a sandboy, kissed Nana gallantly and waltzed with the chairs. And she was so charmed by this conduct that she at length got to hope that nothing would be found on the chest of drawers, despite the difficulty she experienced in making both ends meet. One day she even returned him his three francs, telling him a tale to the effect that she still had yesterday's money. As he had given her nothing then, he hesitated for some moments, as though he dreaded a lecture. But she gazed at him with her loving eyes and hugged him in such utter self-surrender that he pocketed the money again with that little convulsive twitch of the fingers peculiar to a miser when he regains possession of that which has been well-nigh lost. From that day forth he never troubled himself about money again or inquired whence it came. But when there were potatoes on the table he looked intoxicated with delight and would laugh and smack his lips before her turkeys and legs of mutton, though of course this did not prevent his dealing Nana sundry sharp smacks, as though to keep his hand in amid all his happiness.

Nana had indeed found means to provide for all needs, and the place on certain days overflowed with good things. Twice a week, regularly, Bosc had indigestion. One evening as Mme Lerat was withdrawing from the scene in high dudgeon because she had noticed a copious dinner she was not destined to eat in process of preparation, she could not prevent herself asking brutally who paid for it all. Nana was taken by surprise; she grew foolish and began crying.

"Ah, that's a pretty business," said the aunt, who had divined her meaning.

Nana had resigned herself to it for the sake of enjoying peace in her own

home. Then, too, the Tricon was to blame. She had come across her in the Rue de Laval one fine day when Fontan had gone out raging about a dish of cod. She had accordingly consented to the proposals made her by the Tricon, who happened just then to be in difficulty. As Fontan never came in before six o'clock, she made arrangements for her afternoons and used to bring back forty francs, sixty francs, sometimes more. She might have made it a matter of ten and fifteen louis had she been able to maintain her former position, but as matters stood she was very glad thus to earn enough to keep the pot boiling. At night she used to forget all her sorrows when Bosc sat there bursting with dinner and Fontan leaned on his elbows and with an expression of lofty superiority becoming a man who is loved for his own sake allowed her to kiss him on the eyelids.

In due course Nana's very adoration of her darling, her dear old duck, which was all the more passionately blind, seeing that now she paid for everything, plunged her back into the muddiest depths of her calling. She roamed the streets and loitered on the pavement in quest of a five-franc piece, just as when she was a slipshod baggage years ago. One Sunday at La Rochefoucauld Market she had made her peace with Satin after having flown at her with furious reproaches about Mme Robert. But Satin had been content to answer that when one didn't like a thing there was no reason why one should want to disgust others with it. And Nana, who was by way of being wide-minded, had accepted the philosophic view that you never can tell where your tastes will lead you and had forgiven her. Her curiosity was even excited, and she began questioning her about obscure vices and was astounded to be adding to her information at her time of life and with her knowledge. She burst out laughing and gave vent to various expressions of surprise. It struck her as so queer, and yet she was a little shocked by it, for she was really quite the philistine outside the pale of her own habits. So she went back to Laure's and fed there when Fontan was dining out. She derived much amusement from the stories and the amours and the jealousies which inflamed the female customers without hindering their appetites in the slightest degree. Nevertheless, she still was not quite in it, as she herself phrased it. The vast Laure, meltingly maternal as ever, used often to invite her to pass a day or two at her Asnières Villa, a country house containing seven spare bedrooms. But she used to refuse; she was afraid. Satin, however, swore she was mistaken about it, that gentlemen from Paris swung you in swings and played tonneau with you, and so she promised to come at some future time when it would be possible for her to leave town.

At that time Nana was much tormented by circumstances and not at all festively inclined. She needed money, and when the Tricon did not want her, which too often happened, she had no notion where to bestow her charms. Then began a series of wild descents upon the Parisian pavement, plunges into the baser sort of vice, whose votaries prowl in muddy bystreets under the restless flicker of gas lamps. Nana went back to the public-house balls in the suburbs, where she had kicked up her heels in the early ill-shod days. She revisited the dark corners on the outer boulevards, where when she was fifteen

years old men used to hug her while her father was looking for her in order to give her a hiding. Both the women would speed along, visiting all the ball-rooms and restaurants in a quarter and climbing innumerable staircases which were wet with spittle and spilled beer, or they would stroll quietly about, going up streets and planting themselves in front of carriage gates. Satin, who had served her apprenticeship in the Quartier Latin, used to take Nana to Bullier's and the public houses in the Boulevard Saint-Michel. But the vacations were drawing on, and the Quarter looked too starved. Eventually they always returned to the principal boulevards, for it was there they ran the best chance of getting what they wanted. From the heights of Montmartre to the observatory plateau they scoured the whole town in the way we have been describing. They were out on rainy evenings, when their boots got worn down, and on hot evenings, when their linen clung to their skins. There were long periods of waiting and endless periods of walking; there were jostlings and disputes and the nameless, brutal caresses of the stray passer-by who was taken by them to some miserable furnished room and came swearing down the greasy stairs afterward.

The summer was drawing to a close, a stormy summer of burning nights. The pair used to start out together after dinner, toward nine o'clock. On the pavements of the Rue Notre Dame de la Lorette two long files of women scudded along with tucked-up skirts and bent heads, keeping close to the shops but never once glancing at the displays in the shopwindows as they hurried busily down toward the boulevards. This was the hungry exodus from the Quartier Breda which took place nightly when the street lamps had just been lit. Nana and Satin used to skirt the church and then march off along the Rue le Peletier. When they were some hundred yards from the Café Riche and had fairly reached their scene of operations they would shake out the skirts of their dresses, which up till that moment they had been holding carefully up, and begin sweeping the pavements, regardless of dust. With much swaying of the hips they strolled delicately along, slackening their pace when they crossed the bright light thrown from one of the great cafés. With shoulders thrown back, shrill and noisy laughter and many backward glances at the men who turned to look at them, they marched about and were completely in their element. In the shadow of night their artificially whitened faces, their rouged lips and their darkened eyelids became as charming and suggestive as if the inmates of a make-believe trumpery oriental bazaar had been sent forth into the open street. Till eleven at night they sauntered gaily along among the rudely jostling crowds, contenting themselves with an occasional "dirty ass!" hurled after the clumsy people whose boot heels had torn a flounce or two from their dresses. Little familiar salutations would pass between them and the café waiters, and at times they would stop and chat in front of a small table and accept of drinks, which they consumed with much deliberation, as became people not sorry to sit down for a bit while waiting for the theaters to empty. But as night advanced, if they had not made one or two trips in the direction of the Rue la Rochefoucauld, they became abject strumpets, and their hunt for men grew more ferocious than ever. Beneath the trees in

the darkening and fast-emptying boulevards fierce bargainings took place, accompanied by oaths and blows. Respectable family parties—fathers, mothers and daughters—who were used to such scenes, would pass quietly by the while without quickening their pace. Afterward, when they had walked from the opera to the *gymnase* some half-score times and in the deepening night men were rapidly dropping off homeward for good and all, Nana and Satin kept to the sidewalk in the Rue du Faubourg Montmartre. There up till two o'clock in the morning restaurants, bars and ham-and-beef shops were brightly lit up, while a noisy mob of women hung obstinately round the doors of the cafés. This suburb was the only corner of night Paris which was still alight and still alive, the only market still open to nocturnal bargains. These last were openly struck between group and group and from one end of the street to the other, just as in the wide and open corridor of a disorderly house. On such evenings as the pair came home without having had any success they used to wrangle together. The Rue Notre Dame de la Lorette stretched dark and deserted in front of them. Here and there the crawling shadow of a woman was discernible, for the Quarter was going home and going home late, and poor creatures, exasperated at a night of fruitless loitering, were unwilling to give up the chase and would still stand, disputing in hoarse voices with any strayed reveler they could catch at the corner of the Rue Breda or the Rue Fontaine.

Nevertheless, some windfalls came in their way now and then in the shape of louis picked up in the society of elegant gentlemen, who slipped their decorations into their pockets as they went upstairs with them. Satin had an especially keen scent for these. On rainy evenings, when the dripping city exhaled an unpleasant odor suggestive of a great untidy bed, she knew that the soft weather and the fetid reek of the town's holes and corners were sure to send the men mad. And so she watched the best dressed among them, for she knew by their pale eyes what their state was. On such nights it was as though a fit of fleshly madness were passing over Paris. The girl was rather nervous certainly, for the most modish gentlemen were always the most obscene. All the varnish would crack off a man, and the brute beast would show itself, exacting, monstrous in lust, a past master in corruption. But besides being nervous, that trollop of a Satin was lacking in respect. She would blurt out awful things in front of dignified gentlemen in carriages and assure them that their coachmen were better bred than they because they behaved respectfully toward the women and did not half kill them with their diabolical tricks and suggestions. The way in which smart people sprawled head over heels into all the cesspools of vice still caused Nana some surprise, for she had a few prejudices remaining, though Satin was rapidly destroying them.

"Well then," she used to say when talking seriously about the matter, "there's no such thing as virtue left, is there?"

From one end of the social ladder to the other everybody was on the loose! Good gracious! Some nice things ought to be going on in Paris between nine o'clock in the evening and three in the morning! And with that she began making very merry and declaring that if one could only have looked into

every room one would have seen some funny sights—the little people going it head over ears and a good lot of swells, too, playing the swine rather harder than the rest. Oh, she was finishing her education!

One evening when she came to call for Satin she recognized the Marquis de Chouard. He was coming downstairs with quaking legs; his face was ashen white, and he leaned heavily on the banisters. She pretended to be blowing her nose. Upstairs she found Satin amid indescribable filth. No household work had been done for a week; her bed was disgusting, and ewers and basins were standing about in all directions. Nana expressed surprise at her knowing the marquis. Oh yes, she knew him! He had jolly well bored her confectioner and her when they were together. At present he used to come back now and then, but he nearly bothered her life out, going sniffing into all the dirty corners—yes, even into her slippers!

"Yes, dear girl, my slippers! Oh, he's the dirtiest old beast, always wanting one to do things!"

The sincerity of these low debauches rendered Nana especially uneasy. Seeing the courtesans around her slowly dying of it every day, she recalled to mind the comedy of pleasure she had taken part in when she was in the heyday of success. Moreover, Satin inspired her with an awful fear of the police. She was full of anecdotes about them. Formerly she had been the mistress of a plain-clothes man, had consented to this in order to be left in peace, and on two occasions he had prevented her from being put "on the lists." But at present she was in a great fright, for if she were to be nabbed again there was a clear case against her. You had only to listen to her! For the sake of perquisites the police used to take up as many women as possible. They laid hold of everybody and quieted you with a slap if you shouted, for they were sure of being defended in their actions and rewarded, even when they had taken a virtuous girl among the rest. In the summer they would swoop upon the boulevard in parties of twelve or fifteen, surround a whole long reach of sidewalk and fish up as many as thirty women in an evening. Satin, however, knew the likely places, and the moment she saw a plain-clothes man heaving in sight she took to her heels, while the long lines of women on the pavements scattered in consternation and fled through the surrounding crowd. The dread of the law and of the magistracy was such that certain women would stand as though paralyzed in the doorways of the cafés while the raid was sweeping the avenue without. But Satin was even more afraid of being denounced, for her pastry cook had proved blackguard enough to threaten to sell her when she had left him. Yes, that was a fake by which men lived on their mistresses! Then, too, there were the dirty women who delivered you up out of sheer treachery if you were prettier than they! Nana listened to these recitals and felt her terrors growing upon her. She had always trembled before the law, that unknown power, that form of revenge practiced by men able and willing to crush her in the certain absence of all defenders. Saint-Lazare she pictured as a grave, a dark hole, in which they buried live women after they had cut off their hair. She admitted that it was only necessary to leave Fontan and seek powerful protectors. But as matters stood it was in vain that Satin talked to

her of certain lists of women's names, which it was the duty of the plain-clothes men to consult, and of certain photographs accompanying the lists, the originals of which were on no account to be touched. The reassurance did not make her tremble the less, and she still saw herself hustled and dragged along and finally subjected to the official medical inspection. The thought of the official armchair filled her with shame and anguish, for had she not bade it defiance a score of times?

Now it so happened that one evening toward the close of September, as she was walking with Satin in the Boulevard Poissonnière, the latter suddenly began tearing along at a terrible pace. And when Nana asked her what she meant thereby:

"It's the plain-clothes men!" whispered Satin. "Off with you! Off with you!"

A wild stampede took place amid the surging crowd. Skirts streamed out behind and were torn. There were blows and shrieks. A woman fell down. The crowd of bystanders stood hilariously watching this rough police raid while the plain-clothes men rapidly narrowed their circle. Meanwhile Nana had lost Satin. Her legs were failing her, and she would have been taken up for a certainty had not a man caught her by the arm and led her away in front of the angry police. It was Prullière, and he had just recognized her. Without saying a word he turned down the Rue Rougemont with her. It was just then quite deserted, and she was able to regain breath there, but at first her faintness and exhaustion were such that he had to support her. She did not even thank him.

"Look here," he said, "you must recover a bit. Come up to my rooms."

He lodged in the Rue Bergère close by. But she straightened herself up at once.

"No, I don't want to."

Thereupon he waxed coarse and rejoined:

"Why don't you want to, eh? Why, everybody visits my rooms."

"Because I don't."

In her opinion that explained everything. She was too fond of Fontan to betray him with one of his friends. The other people ceased to count the moment there was no pleasure in the business, and necessity compelled her to it. In view of her idiotic obstinacy Prullière, as became a pretty fellow whose vanity had been wounded, did a cowardly thing.

"Very well, do as you like!" he cried. "Only I don't side with you, my dear. You must get out of the scrape by yourself."

And with that he left her. Terrors got hold of her again, and scurrying past shops and turning white whenever a man drew nigh, she fetched an immense compass before reaching Montmartre.

On the morrow, while still suffering from the shock of last night's terrors, Nana went to her aunt's and at the foot of a small empty street in the Batignolles found herself face to face with Labordette. At first they both appeared embarrassed, for with his usual complaisance he was busy on a secret errand. Nevertheless, he was the first to regain his self-possession and to announce himself fortunate in meeting her. Yes, certainly, everybody was still wonder-

ing at Nana's total eclipse. People were asking for her, and old friends were pining. And with that he grew quite paternal and ended by sermonizing.

"Frankly speaking, between you and me, my dear, the thing's getting stupid. One can understand a mash, but to go to that extent, to be trampled on like that and to get nothing but knocks! Are you playing up for the 'Virtue Prizes' then?"

She listened to him with an embarrassed expression. But when he told her about Rose, who was triumphantly enjoying her conquest of Count Muffat, a flame came into her eyes.

"Oh, if I wanted to—" she muttered.

As became an obliging friend, he at once offered to act as intercessor. But she refused his help, and he thereupon attacked her in an opposite quarter.

He informed her that Bordenave was busy mounting a play of Fauchery's containing a splendid part for her.

"What, a play with a part!" she cried in amazement. "But he's in it and he's told me nothing about it!"

She did not mention Fontan by name. However, she grew calm again directly and declared that she would never go on the stage again. Labordette doubtless remained unconvinced, for he continued with smiling insistence.

"You know, you need fear nothing with me. I get your Muffat ready for you, and you go on the stage again, and I bring him to you like a little dog!"

"No!" she cried decisively.

And she left him. Her heroic conduct made her tenderly pitiful toward herself. No blackguard of a man would ever have sacrificed himself like that without trumpeting the fact abroad. Nevertheless, she was struck by one thing: Labordette had given her exactly the same advice as Francis had given her. That evening when Fontan came home she questioned him about Fauchery's piece. The former had been back at the Variétés for two months past. Why then had he not told her about the part?

"What part?" he said in his ill-humored tone. "The grand lady's part, maybe? The deuce, you believe you've got talent then! Why, such a part would utterly do for you, my girl! You're meant for comic business—there's no denying it!"

She was dreadfully wounded. All that evening he kept chaffing her, calling her Mlle Mars. But the harder he hit the more bravely she suffered, for she derived a certain bitter satisfaction from this heroic devotion of hers, which rendered her very great and very loving in her own eyes. Ever since she had gone with other men in order to supply his wants her love for him had increased, and the fatigues and disgusts encountered outside only added to the flame. He was fast becoming a sort of pet vice for which she paid, a necessity of existence it was impossible to do without, seeing that blows only stimulated her desires. He, on his part, seeing what a good tame thing she had become, ended by abusing his privileges. She was getting on his nerves, and he began to conceive so fierce a loathing for her that he forgot to keep count of his real interests. When Bosc made his customary remarks to him he cried out in exasperation, for which there was no apparent cause, that he had had

enough of her and of her good dinners and that he would shortly chuck her out of doors if only for the sake of making another woman a present of his seven thousand francs. Indeed, that was how their liaison ended.

One evening Nana came in toward eleven o'clock and found the door bolted. She tapped once—there was no answer; twice—still no answer. Meanwhile she saw light under the door, and Fontan inside did not trouble to move. She rapped again unwearyingly; she called him and began to get annoyed. At length Fontan's voice became audible; he spoke slowly and rather unctuously and uttered but this one word:

"Merde!"

She beat on the door with her fists.

"Merde!"

She banged hard enough to smash in the woodwork.

"Merde!"

And for upward of a quarter of an hour the same foul expression buffeted her, answering like a jeering echo to every blow wherewith she shook the door. At length, seeing that she was not growing tired, he opened sharply, planted himself on the threshold, folded his arms and said in the same cold, brutal voice:

"By God, have you done yet? What d'you want? Are you going to let us sleep in peace, eh? You can quite see I've got company tonight."

He was certainly not alone, for Nana perceived the little woman from the Bouffes with the untidy tow hair and the gimlet-hole eyes, standing enjoying herself in her shift among the furniture she had paid for. But Fontan stepped out on the landing. He looked terrible, and he spread out and crooked his great fingers as if they were pincers.

"Hook it or I'll strangle you!"

Thereupon Nana burst into a nervous fit of sobbing. She was frightened and she made off. This time it was she that was being kicked out of doors. And in her fury the thought of Muffat suddenly occurred to her. Ah, to be sure, Fontan, of all men, ought never to have done her such a turn!

When she was out in the street her first thought was to go and sleep with Satin, provided the girl had no one with her. She met her in front of her house, for she, too, had been turned out of doors by her landlord. He had just had a padlock affixed to her door—quite illegally, of course, seeing that she had her own furniture. She swore and talked of having him up before the commissary of police. In the meantime, as midnight was striking, they had to begin thinking of finding a bed. And Satin, deeming it unwise to let the plain-clothes men into her secrets, ended by taking Nana to a woman who kept a little hotel in the Rue de Laval. Here they were assigned a narrow room on the first floor, the window of which opened on the courtyard. Satin remarked:

"I should gladly have gone to Mme Robert's. There's always a corner there for me. But with you it's out of the question. She's getting absurdly jealous; she beat me the other night."

When they had shut themselves in, Nana, who had not yet relieved her feelings, burst into tears and again and again recounted Fontan's dirty be-

havior. Satin listened complaisantly, comforted her, grew even more angry than she in denunciation of the male sex.

"Oh, the pigs, the pigs! Look here, we'll have nothing more to do with them!"

Then she helped Nana to undress with all the small, busy attentions, becoming a humble little friend. She kept saying coaxingly:

"Let's go to bed as fast as we can, pet. We shall be better off there! Oh, how silly you are to get crusty about things! I tell you, they're dirty brutes. Don't think any more about 'em. I—I love you very much. Don't cry, and oblige your own little darling girl."

And once in bed, she forthwith took Nana in her arms and soothed and comforted her. She refused to hear Fontan's name mentioned again, and each time it recurred to her friend's lips she stopped it with a kiss. Her lips pouted in pretty indignation; her hair lay loose about her, and her face glowed with tenderness and childlike beauty. Little by little her soft embrace compelled Nana to dry her tears. She was touched and replied to Satin's caresses. When two o'clock struck the candle was still burning, and a sound of soft, smothered laughter and lovers' talk was audible in the room.

But suddenly a loud noise came up from the lower floors of the hotel, and Satin, with next to nothing on, got up and listened intently.

"The police!" she said, growing very pale.

"Oh, blast our bad luck! We're bloody well done for!"

Often had she told stories about the raids on hotels made by the plain-clothes men. But that particular night neither of them had suspected anything when they took shelter in the Rue de Laval. At the sound of the word "police" Nana lost her head. She jumped out of bed and ran across the room with the scared look of a madwoman about to jump out of the window. Luckily, however, the little courtyard was roofed with glass, which was covered with an iron-wire grating at the level of the girls' bedroom. At sight of this she ceased to hesitate; she stepped over the window prop, and with her chemise flying and her legs bared to the night air she vanished in the gloom.

"Stop! Stop!" said Satin in a great fright. "You'll kill yourself."

Then as they began hammering at the door, she shut the window like a good-natured girl and threw her friend's clothes down into a cupboard. She was already resigned to her fate and comforted herself with the thought that, after all, if she were to be put on the official list she would no longer be so "beastly frightened" as of yore. So she pretended to be heavy with sleep. She yawned; she palavered and ended by opening the door to a tall, burly fellow with an unkempt beard, who said to her:

"Show your hands! You've got no needle pricks on them: you don't work. Now then, dress!"

"But I'm not a dressmaker; I'm a burnisher," Satin brazenly declared.

Nevertheless, she dressed with much docility, knowing that argument was out of the question. Cries were ringing through the hotel; a girl was clinging to doorposts and refusing to budge an inch. Another girl, in bed with a lover, who was answering for her legality, was acting the honest woman who had

been grossly insulted and spoke of bringing an action against the prefect of police. For close on an hour there was a noise of heavy shoes on the stairs, of fists hammering on doors, of shrill disputes terminating in sobs, of petticoats rustling along the walls, of all the sounds, in fact, attendant on the sudden awakening and scared departure of a flock of women as they were roughly packed off by three plain-clothes men, headed by a little oily-mannered, fair-haired commissary of police. After they had gone the hotel relapsed into deep silence.

Nobody had betrayed her; Nana was saved. Shivering and half dead with fear, she came groping back into the room. Her bare feet were cut and bleeding, for they had been torn by the grating. For a long while she remained sitting on the edge of the bed, listening and listening. Toward morning, however, she went to sleep again, and at eight o'clock, when she woke up, she escaped from the hotel and ran to her aunt's. When Mme Lerat, who happened just then to be drinking her morning coffee with Zoé, beheld her bedraggled plight and haggard face, she took note of the hour and at once understood the state of the case.

"It's come to it, eh?" she cried. "I certainly told you that he would take the skin off your back one of these days. Well, well, come in; you'll always find a kind welcome here."

Zoé had risen from her chair and was muttering with respectful familiarity: "Madame is restored to us at last. I was waiting for Madame."

But Mme Lerat insisted on Nana's going and kissing Louiset at once, because, she said, the child took delight in his mother's nice ways. Louiset, a sickly child with poor blood, was still asleep, and when Nana bent over his white, scrofulous face, the memory of all she had undergone during the last few months brought a choking lump into her throat.

"Oh, my poor little one, my poor little one!" she gasped, bursting into a final fit of sobbing.

CHAPTER IX

THE *Petite Duchesse* was being rehearsed at the Variétés. The first act had just been carefully gone through, and the second was about to begin. Seated in old armchairs in front of the stage, Fauchery and Bordenave were discussing various points while the prompter, Father Cossard, a little hump-backed man perched on a straw-bottomed chair, was turning over the pages of the manuscript, a pencil between his lips.

"Well, what are they waiting for?" cried Bordenave on a sudden, tapping the floor savagely with his heavy cane. "Barillot, why don't they begin?"

"It's Monsieur Bosc that has disappeared," replied Barillot, who was acting as second stage manager.

Then there arose a tempest, and everybody shouted for Bosc while Bordenave swore.

"Always the same thing, by God! It's all very well ringing for 'em: they're

always where they've no business to be. And then they grumble when they're kept till after four o'clock."

But Bosc just then came in with supreme tranquillity.

"Eh? What? What do they want me for? Oh, it's my turn! You ought to have said so. All right! Simonne gives the cue: 'Here are the guests,' and I come in. Which way must I come in?"

"Through the door, of course," cried Fauchery in great exasperation.

"Yes, but where is the door?"

At this Bordenave fell upon Barillot and once more set to work swearing and hammering the boards with his cane.

"By God! I said a chair was to be put there to stand for the door, and every day we have to get it done again. Barillot! Where's Barillot? Another of 'em! Why, they're all going!"

Nevertheless, Barillot came and planted the chair down in person, mutely weathering the storm as he did so. And the rehearsal began again. Simonne, in her hat and furs, began moving about like a maidservant busy arranging furniture. She paused to say:

"I'm not warm, you know, so I keep my hands in my muff."

Then changing her voice, she greeted Bosc with a little cry:

"La, it's Monsieur le Comte. You're the first to come, Monsieur le Comte, and Madame will be delighted."

Bosc had muddy trousers and a huge yellow overcoat, round the collar of which a tremendous comforter was wound. On his head he wore an old hat, and he kept his hands in his pockets. He did not act but dragged himself along, remarking in a hollow voice:

"Don't disturb your mistress, Isabelle; I want to take her by surprise."

The rehearsal took its course. Bordenave knitted his brows. He had slipped down low in his armchair and was listening with an air of fatigue. Fauchery was nervous and kept shifting about in his seat. Every few minutes he itched with the desire to interrupt, but he restrained himself. He heard a whispering in the dark and empty house behind him.

"Is she there?" he asked, leaning over toward Bordenave.

The latter nodded affirmatively. Before accepting the part of Géraldine, which he was offering her, Nana had been anxious to see the piece, for she hesitated to play a courtesan's part a second time. She, in fact, aspired to an honest woman's part. Accordingly she was hiding in the shadows of a corner box in company with Labordette, who was managing matters for her with Bordenave. Fauchery glanced in her direction and then once more set himself to follow the rehearsal.

Only the front of the stage was lit up. A flaring gas burner on a support, which was fed by a pipe from the footlights, burned in front of a reflector and cast its full brightness over the immediate foreground. It looked like a big yellow eye glaring through the surrounding semiobscurity, where it flamed in a doubtful, melancholy way. Cossard was holding up his manuscript against the slender stem of this arrangement. He wanted to see more clearly, and in the flood of light his hump was sharply outlined. As to Bordenave and Fau-

chery, they were already drowned in shadow. It was only in the heart of this enormous structure, on a few square yards of stage, that a faint glow suggested the light cast by some lantern nailed up in a railway station. It made the actors look like eccentric phantoms and set their shadows dancing after them. The remainder of the stage was full of mist and suggested a house in process of being pulled down, a church nave in utter ruin. It was littered with ladders, with set pieces and with scenery, of which the faded painting suggested heaped-up rubbish. Hanging high in air, the scenes had the appearance of great ragged clouts suspended from the rafters of some vast old-clothes shop, while above these again a ray of bright sunlight fell from a window and clove the shadow round the flies with a bar of gold.

Meanwhile actors were chatting at the back of the stage while awaiting their cues. Little by little they had raised their voices.

"Confound it, will you be silent?" howled Bordenave, raging up and down in his chair. "I can't hear a word. Go outside if you want to talk; *we* are at work. Barillot, if there's any more talking I clap on fines all round!"

They were silent for a second or two. They were sitting in a little group on a bench and some rustic chairs in the corner of a scenic garden, which was standing ready to be put in position as it would be used in the opening act the same evening. In the middle of this group Fontan and Prullière were listening to Rose Mignon, to whom the manager of the Folies-Dramatique Théâtre had been making magnificent offers. But a voice was heard shouting:

"The duchess! Saint-Firmin! The duchess and Saint-Firmin are wanted!"

Only when the call was repeated did Prullière remember that he was Saint-Firmin! Rose, who was playing the Duchess Hélène, was already waiting to go on with him while old Bosc slowly returned to his seat, dragging one foot after the other over the sonorous and deserted boards. Clarisse offered him a place on the bench beside her.

"What's he bawling like that for?" she said in allusion to Bordenave. "Things will be getting rosy soon! A piece can't be put on nowadays without its getting on his nerves."

Bosc shrugged his shoulders; he was above such storms. Fontan whispered:

"He's afraid of a fiasco. The piece strikes me as idiotic."

Then he turned to Clarisse and again referred to what Rose had been telling them:

"D'you believe in the offers of the Folies people, eh? Three hundred francs an evening for a hundred nights! Why not a country house into the bargain? If his wife were to be given three hundred francs Mignon would chuck my friend Bordenave and do it jolly sharp too!"

Clarisse was a believer in the three hundred francs. That man Fontan was always picking holes in his friends' successes! Just then Simonne interrupted her. She was shivering with cold. Indeed, they were all buttoned up to the ears and had comforters on, and they looked up at the ray of sunlight which shone brightly above them but did not penetrate the cold gloom of the theater. In the streets outside there was a frost under a November sky.

"And there's no fire in the greenroom!" said Simonne. "It's disgusting; he is just becoming a skinflint! I want to be off; I don't want to get seedy."

"Silence, I say!" Bordenave once more thundered.

Then for a minute or so a confused murmur alone was audible as the actors went on repeating their parts. There was scarcely any appropriate action, and they spoke in even tones so as not to tire themselves. Nevertheless, when they did emphasize a particular shade of meaning they cast a glance at the house, which lay before them like a yawning gulf. It was suffused with vague, ambient shadow, which resembled the fine dust floating pent in some high, windowless loft. The deserted house, whose sole illumination was the twilight radiance of the stage, seemed to slumber in melancholy and mysterious effacement. Near the ceiling dense night smothered the frescoes, while from the several tiers of stage boxes on either hand huge widths of gray canvas stretched down to protect the neighboring hangings. In fact, there was no end to these coverings; bands of canvas had been thrown over the velvet-covered ledges in front of the various galleries which they shrouded thickly. Their pale hue stained the surrounding shadows, and of the general decorations of the house only the dark recesses of the boxes were distinguishable. These served to outline the framework of the several stories, where the seats were so many stains of red velvet turned black. The chandelier had been let down as far as it would go, and it so filled the region of the stalls with its pendants as to suggest a flitting and to set one thinking that the public had started on a journey from which they would never return.

Just about then Rose, as the little duchess who has been misled into the society of a courtesan, came to the footlights, lifted up her hands and pouted adorably at the dark and empty theater, which was as sad as a house of mourning.

"Good heavens, what queer people!" she said, emphasizing the phrase and confident that it would have its effect.

Far back in the corner box in which she was hiding Nana sat enveloped in a great shawl. She was listening to the play and devouring Rose with her eyes. Turning toward Labordette, she asked him in a low tone:

"You are sure he'll come?"

"Quite sure. Without doubt he'll come with Mignon, so as to have an excuse for coming. As soon as he makes his appearance you'll go up into Mathilde's dressing room, and I'll bring him to you there."

They were talking of Count Muffat. Labordette had arranged this interview with him on neutral ground. He had had a serious talk with Bordenave, whose affairs had been gravely damaged by two successive failures. Accordingly Bordenave had hastened to lend him his theater and to offer Nana a part, for he was anxious to win the count's favor and hoped to be able to borrow from him.

"And this part of Géraldine, what d'you thing of it?" continued Labordette.

But Nana sat motionless and vouchsafed no reply. After the first act, in which the author showed how the Duc de Beurivage played his wife false with the blonde Géraldine, a comic-opera celebrity, the second act witnessed the Duchess Hélène's arrival at the house of the actress on the occasion of a

masked ball being given by the latter. The duchess has come to find out by what magical process ladies of that sort conquer and retain their husbands' affections. A cousin, the handsome Oscar de Saint-Firmin, introduces her and hopes to be able to debauch her. And her first lesson causes her great surprise, for she hears Géraldine swearing like a hodman at the duke, who suffers with most ecstatic submissiveness. The episode causes her to cry out, "Dear me, if that's the way one ought to talk to the men!" Géraldine had scarce any other scene in the act save this one. As to the duchess, she is very soon punished for her curiosity, for an old buck, the Baron de Tardiveau, takes her for a courtesan and becomes very gallant, while on her other side Beaurivage sits on a lounging chair and makes his peace with Géraldine by dint of kisses and caresses. As this last lady's part had not yet been assigned to anyone, Father Cossard had got up to read it, and he was now figuring away in Bosc's arms and emphasizing it despite himself. At this point, while the rehearsal was dragging monotonously on, Fauchery suddenly jumped from his chair. He had restrained himself up to that moment, but now his nerves got the better of him.

"That's not it!" he cried.

The actors paused awkwardly enough while Fontan sneered and asked in his most contemptuous voice:

"Eh? What's not it? Who's not doing it right?"

"Nobody is! You're quite wrong, quite wrong!" continued Fauchery, and, gesticulating wildly, he came striding over the stage and began himself to act the scene.

"Now look here, you Fontan, do please comprehend the way Tardiveau gets packed off. You must lean forward like this in order to catch hold of the duchess. And then you, Rose, must change your position like that but not too soon—only when you hear the kiss."

He broke off and in the heat of explanation shouted to Cossard:

"Géraldine, give the kiss! Loudly, so that it may be heard!"

Father Cossard turned toward Bosc and smacked his lips vigorously.

"Good! That's the kiss," said Fauchery triumphantly. "Once more; let's have it once more. Now you see, Rose, I've had time to move, and then I give a little cry—so: 'Oh, she's given him a kiss.' But before I do that, Tardiveau must go up the stage. D'you hear, Fontan? You go up. Come, let's try it again, all together."

The actors continued the scene again, but Fontan played his part with such an ill grace that they made no sort of progress. Twice Fauchery had to repeat his explanation, each time acting it out with more warmth than before. The actors listened to him with melancholy faces, gazed momentarily at one another, as though he had asked them to walk on their heads, and then awkwardly essayed the passage, only to pull up short directly afterward, looking as stiff as puppets whose strings have just been snapped.

"No, it beats me; I can't understand it," said Fontan at length, speaking in the insolent manner peculiar to him.

Bordenave had never once opened his lips. He had slipped quite down in his

armchair, so that only the top of his hat was now visible in the doubtful flicker of the gaslight on the stand. His cane had fallen from his grasp and lay slantwise across his waistcoat. Indeed, he seemed to be asleep. But suddenly he sat bolt upright.

"It's idiotic, my boy," he announced quietly to Fauchery.

"What d'you mean, idiotic?" cried the author, growing very pale. "It's you that are the idiot, my dear boy!"

Bordenave began to get angry at once. He repeated the word "idiotic" and, seeking a more forcible expression, hit upon "imbecile" and "damned foolish." The public would hiss, and the act would never be finished! And when Fauchery, without, indeed, being very deeply wounded by these big phrases, which always recurred when a new piece was being put on, grew savage and called the other a brute, Bordenave went beyond all bounds, brandished his cane in the air, snorted like a bull and shouted:

"Good God! Why the hell can't you shut up? We've lost a quarter of an hour over this folly. Yes, folly! There's no sense in it. And it's so simple, after all's said and done! You, Fontan, mustn't move. You, Rose, must make your little movement, just that, no more; d'ye see? And then you come down. Now then, let's get it done this journey. Give the kiss, Cossard."

Then ensued confusion. The scene went no better than before. Bordenave, in his turn, showed them how to act it about as gracefully as an elephant might have done, while Fauchery sneered and shrugged pityingly. After that Fontan put his word in, and even Bosc made so bold as to give advice. Rose, thoroughly tired out, had ended by sitting down on the chair which indicated the door. No one knew where they had got to, and by way of finish to it all Simonne made a premature entry, under the impression that her cue had been given her, and arrived amid the confusion. This so enraged Bordenave that he whirled his stick round in a terrific manner and caught her a sounding thwack to the rearward. At rehearsal he used frequently to drub his former mistress. Simonne ran away, and this furious outcry followed her:

"Take that, and, by God, if I'm annoyed again I shut the whole shop up at once!"

Fauchery pushed his hat down over his forehead and pretended to be going to leave the theater. But he stopped at the top of the stage and came down again when he saw Bordenave perspiringly resuming his seat. Then he, too, took up his old position in the other armchair. For some seconds they sat motionless side by side while oppressive silence reigned in the shadowy house. The actors waited for nearly two minutes. They were all heavy with exhaustion and felt as though they had performed an overwhelming task.

"Well, let's go on," said Bordenave at last. He spoke in his usual voice and was perfectly calm.

"Yes, let's go on," Fauchery repeated. "We'll arrange the scene tomorrow."

And with that they dragged on again and rehearsed their parts with as much listlessness and as fine an indifference as ever. During the dispute between manager and author Fontan and the rest had been taking things very comfortably on the rustic bench and seats at the back of the stage, where they had

been chuckling, grumbling and saying fiercely cutting things. But when Simonne came back, still smarting from her blow and choking with sobs, they grew melodramatic and declared that had they been in her place they would have strangled the swine. She began wiping her eyes and nodding approval. It was all over between them, she said. She was leaving him, especially as Steiner had offered to give her a grand start in life only the day before. Clarisse was much astonished at this, for the banker was quite ruined, but Prullière began laughing and reminded them of the neat manner in which that confounded Israelite had puffed himself alongside of Rose in order to get his Landes saltworks afloat on 'change. Just at that time he was airing a new project, namely, a tunnel under the Bosphorus. Simonne listened with the greatest interest to this fresh piece of information.

As to Clarisse, she had been raging for a week past. Just fancy, that beast La Faloise, whom she had succeeded in chucking into Gaga's venerable embrace, was coming into the fortune of a very rich uncle! It was just her luck; she had always been destined to make things cozy for other people. Then, too, that pig Bordenave had once more given her a mere scrap of a part, a paltry fifty lines, just as if she could not have played Géraldine! She was yearning for that role and hoping that Nana would refuse it.

"Well, and what about me?" said Prullière with much bitterness. "I haven't got more than two hundred lines. I wanted to give the part up. It's too bad to make me play that fellow Saint-Firmin; why, it's a regular failure! And then what a style it's written in, my dears! It'll fall dead flat, you may be sure."

But just then Simonne, who had been chatting with Father Barillot, came back breathless and announced:

"By the by, talking of Nana, she's in the house."

"Where, where?" asked Clarisse briskly, getting up to look for her.

The news spread at once, and everyone craned forward. The rehearsal was, as it were, momentarily interrupted. But Bordenave emerged from his quiescent condition, shouting:

"What's up, eh? Finish the act, I say. And be quiet out there; it's unbearable!"

Nana was still following the piece from the corner box. Twice Labordette showed an inclination to chat, but she grew impatient and nudged him to make him keep silent. The second act was drawing to a close, when two shadows loomed at the back of the theater. They were creeping softly down, avoiding all noise, and Nana recognized Mignon and Count Muffat. They came forward and silently shook hands with Bordenave.

"Ah, there they are," she murmured with a sigh of relief.

Rose Mignon delivered the last sentences of the act. Thereupon Bordenave said that it was necessary to go through the second again before beginning the third. With that he left off attending to the rehearsal and greeted the count with looks of exaggerated politeness, while Fauchery pretended to be entirely engrossed with his actors, who now grouped themselves round him. Mignon stood whistling carelessly, with his hands behind his back and his eyes fixed complacently on his wife, who seemed rather nervous.

"Well, shall we go upstairs?" Labordette asked Nana. "I'll install you in the dressing room and come down again and fetch him."

Nana forthwith left the corner box. She had to grope her way along the passage outside the stalls, but Bordenave guessed where she was as she passed along in the dark and caught her up at the end of the corridor passing behind the scenes, a narrow tunnel where the gas burned day and night. Here, in order to bluff her into a bargain, he plunged into a discussion of the courtesan's part.

"What a part it is, eh? What a wicked little part! It's made for you. Come and rehearse tomorrow."

Nana was frigid. She wanted to know what the third act was like.

"Oh, it's superb, the third act is! The duchess plays the courtesan in her own house and this disgusts Beaurivage and makes him amend his way. Then there's an awfully funny *quid pro quo*, when Tardiveau arrives and is under the impression that he's at an opera dancer's house."

"And what does Géraldine do in it all?" interrupted Nana.

"Géraldine?" repeated Bordenave in some embarrassment. "She has a scene, not a very long one, but a great success. It's made for you, I assure you! Will you sign?"

She looked steadily at him and at length made answer:

"We'll see about that all in good time."

And she rejoined Labordette, who was waiting for her on the stairs. Everybody in the theater had recognized her, and there was now much whispering, especially between Prullière, who was scandalized at her return, and Clarisse, who was very desirous of the part. As to Fontan, he looked coldly on, pretending unconcern, for he did not think it becoming to round on a woman he had loved. Deep down in his heart, though, his old love had turned to hate, and he nursed the fiercest rancor against her in return for the constant devotion, the personal beauty, the life in common, of which his perverse and monstrous tastes had made him tire.

In the meantime, when Labordette reappeared and went up to the count, Rose Mignon, whose suspicions Nana's presence had excited, understood it all forthwith. Muffat was bothering her to death, but she was beside herself at the thought of being left like this. She broke the silence which she usually maintained on such subjects in her husband's society and said bluntly:

"You see what's going on? My word, if she tries the Steiner trick on again I'll tear her eyes out!"

Tranquilly and haughtily Mignon shrugged his shoulders, as became a man from whom nothing could be hidden.

"Do be quiet," he muttered. "Do me the favor of being quiet, won't you?"

He knew what to rely on now. He had drained his Muffat dry, and he knew that at a sign from Nana he was ready to lie down and be a carpet under her feet. There is no fighting against passions such as that. Accordingly, as he knew what men were, he thought of nothing but how to turn the situation to the best possible account.

It would be necessary to wait on the course of events. And he waited on them.

"Rose, it's your turn!" shouted Bordenave. "The second act's being begun again."

"Off with you then," continued Mignon, "and let me arrange matters."

Then he began bantering, despite all his troubles, and was pleased to congratulate Fauchery on his piece. A very strong piece! Only why was his great lady so chaste? It wasn't natural! With that he sneered and asked who had sat for the portrait of the Duke of Beaurivage, Géraldine's worn-out roué. Fauchery smiled; he was far from annoyed. But Bordenave glanced in Muffat's direction and looked vexed, and Mignon was struck at this and became serious again.

"Let's begin, for God's sake!" yelled the manager. "Now then, Barillot! Eh? What? Isn't Bosc there? Is he bloody well making game of me now?"

Bosc, however, made his appearance quietly enough, and the rehearsal began again just as Labordette was taking the count away with him. The latter was tremulous at the thought of seeing Nana once more. After the rupture had taken place between them there had been a great void in his life. He was idle and fancied himself about to suffer through the sudden change his habits had undergone, and accordingly he had let them take him to see Rose. Besides, his brain had been in such a whirl that he had striven to forget everything and had strenuously kept from seeking out Nana while avoiding an explanation with the countess. He thought, indeed, that he owed his dignity such a measure of forgetfulness. But mysterious forces were at work within, and Nana began slowly to reconquer him. First came thoughts of her, then fleshly cravings and finally a new set of exclusive, tender, well-nigh paternal feelings.

The abominable events attendant on their last interview were gradually effacing themselves. He no longer saw Fontan; he no longer heard the stinging taunt about his wife's adultery with which Nana cast him out of doors. These things were as words whose memory vanished. Yet deep down in his heart there was a poignant smart which wrung him with such increasing pain that it nigh choked him. Childish ideas would occur to him; he imagined that she would never have betrayed him if he had really loved her, and he blamed himself for this. His anguish was becoming unbearable; he was really very wretched. His was the pain of an old wound rather than the blind, present desire which puts up with everything for the sake of immediate possession. He felt a jealous passion for the woman and was haunted by longings for her and her alone, her hair, her mouth, her body. When he remembered the sound of her voice a shiver ran through him; he longed for her as a miser might have done, with refinements of desire begging description. He was, in fact, so dolorously possessed by his passion that when Labordette had begun to broach the subject of an assignation he had thrown himself into his arms in obedience to irresistible impulse. Directly afterward he had, of course, been ashamed of an act of self-abandonment which could not but seem very ridiculous in a man of his position; but Labordette was one who knew when to see and when not to see things, and he gave a further proof of his tact when he

left the count at the foot of the stairs and without effort let slip only these simple words:

"The right-hand passage on the second floor. The door's not shut."

Muffat was alone in that silent corner of the house. As he passed before the players' waiting room, he had peeped through the open doors and noticed the utter dilapidation of the vast chamber, which looked shamefully stained and worn in broad daylight. But what surprised him most as he emerged from the darkness and confusion of the stage was the pure, clear light and deep quiet at present pervading the lofty staircase, which one evening when he had seen it before had been bathed in gas fumes and loud with the footsteps of women scampering over the different floors. He felt that the dressing rooms were empty, the corridors deserted; not a soul was there; not a sound broke the stillness, while through the square windows on the level of the stairs the pale November sunlight filtered and cast yellow patches of light, full of dancing dust, amid the dead, peaceful air which seemed to descend from the regions above.

He was glad of this calm and the silence, and he went slowly up, trying to regain breath as he went, for his heart was thumping, and he was afraid lest he might behave childishly and give way to sighs and tears. Accordingly on the first-floor landing he leaned up against a wall—for he was sure of not being observed—and pressed his handkerchief to his mouth and gazed at the warped steps, the iron balustrade bright with the friction of many hands, the scraped paint on the walls—all the squalor, in fact, which that house of tolerance so crudely displayed at the pale afternoon hour when courtesans are asleep. When he reached the second floor he had to step over a big yellow cat which was lying curled up on a step. With half-closed eyes this cat was keeping solitary watch over the house, where the close and now frozen odors which the women nightly left behind them had rendered him somnolent.

In the right-hand corridor the door of the dressing room had, indeed, not been closed entirely. Nana was waiting. That little Mathilde, a drab of a young girl, kept her dressing room in a filthy state. Chipped jugs stood about anyhow; the dressing table was greasy, and there was a chair covered with red stains, which looked as if someone had bled over the straw. The paper pasted on walls and ceiling was splashed from top to bottom with spots of soapy water and this smelled so disagreeably of lavender scent turned sour that Nana opened the window and for some moments stayed leaning on the sill, breathing the fresh air and craning forward to catch sight of Mme Bron underneath. She could hear her broom wildly at work on the mildewed pantiles of the narrow court which was buried in shadow. A canary, whose cage hung on a shutter, was trilling away piercingly. The sound of carriages in the boulevard and neighboring streets was no longer audible, and the quiet and the wide expanse of sleeping sunlight suggested the country. Looking farther afield, her eye fell on the small buildings and glass roofs of the galleries in the passage and, beyond these, on the tall houses in the Rue Vivienne, the backs of which rose silent and apparently deserted over against her. There was a succession of terrace roofs close by, and on one of these a photographer had

perched a big cage-like construction of blue glass. It was all very gay, and Nana was becoming absorbed in contemplation, when it struck her someone had knocked at the door.

She turned round and shouted:

"Come in!"

At sight of the count she shut the window, for it was not warm, and there was no need for the cavedropping Mme Bron to listen. The pair gazed at one another gravely. Then as the count still kept standing stiffly in front of her, looking ready to choke with emotion, she burst out laughing and said:

"Well! So you're here again, you silly big beast!"

The tumult going on within him was so great that he seemed a man frozen to ice. He addressed Nana as "madame" and esteemed himself happy to see her again. Thereupon she became more familiar than ever in order to bounce matters through.

"Don't do it in the dignified way! You wanted to see me, didn't you? But you didn't intend us to stand looking at one another like a couple of china-ware dogs. We've both been in the wrong— Oh, I certainly forgive you!"

And herewith they agreed not to talk of that affair again, Muffat nodding his assent as Nana spoke. He was calmer now but as yet could find nothing to say, though a thousand things rose tumultuously to his lips. Surprised at his apparent coldness, she began acting a part with much vigor.

"Come," she continued with a faint smile, "you're a sensible man! Now that we've made our peace let's shake hands and be good friends in future."

"What? Good friends?" he murmured in sudden anxiety.

"Yes; it's idiotic, perhaps, but I should like you to think well of me. We've had our little explanation out, and if we meet again we shan't, at any rate, look like a pair of boobies."

He tried to interrupt her with a movement of the hand.

"Let me finish! There's not a man, you understand, able to accuse me of doing him a blackguardly turn; well, and it struck me as horrid to begin in your case. We all have our sense of honor, dear boy."

"But that's not my meaning!" he shouted violently. "Sit down—listen to me!"

And as though he were afraid of seeing her take her departure, he pushed her down on the solitary chair in the room. Then he paced about in growing agitation. The little dressing room was airless and full of sunlight, and no sound from the outside world disturbed its pleasant, peaceful, dampish atmosphere. In the pauses of conversation the shrillings of the canary were alone audible and suggested the distant piping of a flute.

"Listen," he said, planting himself in front of her, "I've come to possess myself of you again. Yes, I want to begin again. You know that well; then why do you talk to me as you do? Answer me; tell me you consent."

Her head was bent, and she was scratching the blood-red straw of the seat underneath her. Seeing him so anxious, she did not hurry to answer. But at last she lifted up her face. It had assumed a grave expression, and into the beautiful eyes she had succeeded in infusing a look of sadness.

"Oh, it's impossible, little man. Never, never, will I live with you again."

"Why?" he stuttered, and his face seemed contracted in unspeakable suffering.

"Why? Hang it all, because— It's impossible; that's about it. I don't want to."

He looked ardently at her for some seconds longer. Then his legs curved under him and he fell on the floor. In a bored voice she added this simple advice:

"Ah, don't be a baby!"

But he was one already. Dropping at her feet, he had put his arms round her waist and was hugging her closely, pressing his face hard against her knees. When he felt her thus—when he once more divined the presence of her velvety limbs beneath the thin fabric of her dress—he was suddenly convulsed and trembled, as it were, with fever, while madly, savagely, he pressed his face against her knees as though he had been anxious to force through her flesh. The old chair creaked, and beneath the low ceiling, where the air was pungent with stale perfumes, smothered sobs of desire were audible.

"Well, and after?" Nana began saying, letting him do as he would. "All this doesn't help you a bit, seeing that the thing's impossible. Good God, what a child you are!"

His energy subsided, but he still stayed on the floor, nor did he relax his hold of her as he said in a broken voice:

"Do at least listen to what I came to offer you. I've already seen a town house close to the Parc Monceau—I would gladly realize your smallest wish. In order to have you all to myself, I would give my whole fortune. Yes, that would be my only condition, that I should have you all to myself! Do you understand? And if you were to consent to be mine only, oh, then I should want you to be the loveliest, the richest, woman on earth. I should give you carriages and diamonds and dresses!"

At each successive offer Nana shook her head proudly. Then seeing that he still continued them, that he even spoke of settling money on her—for he was at loss what to lay at her feet—she apparently lost patience.

"Come, come, have you done bargaining with me? I'm a good sort, and I don't mind giving in to you for a minute or two, as your feelings are making you so ill, but I've had enough of it now, haven't I? So let me get up. You're tiring me."

She extricated herself from his clasp, and once on her feet:

"No, no, no!" she said. "I don't want to!"

With that he gathered himself up painfully and feebly dropped into a chair, in which he leaned back with his face in his hands. Nana began pacing up and down in her turn. For a second or two she looked at the stained wallpaper, the greasy toilet table, the whole dirty little room as it basked in the pale sunlight. Then she paused in front of the count and spoke with quiet directness.

"It's strange how rich men fancy they can have everything for their money. Well, and if I don't want to consent—what then? I don't care a pin for your presents! You might give me Paris, and yet I should say no! Always no! Look here, it's scarcely clean in this room, yet I should think it very nice if I wanted

to live in it with you. But one's fit to kick the bucket in your palaces if one isn't in love. Ah, as to money, my poor pet, I can lay my hands on that if I want to, but I tell you, I trample on it; I spit on it!"

And with that she assumed a disgusted expression. Then she became sentimental and added in a melancholy tone:

"I know of something worth more than money. Oh, if only someone were to give me what I long for!"

He slowly lifted his head, and there was a gleam of hope in his eyes.

"Oh, you can't give it me," she continued; "it doesn't depend on you, and that's the reason I'm talking to you about it. Yes, we're having a chat, so I may as well mention to you that I should like to play the part of the respectable woman in that show of theirs."

"What respectable woman?" he muttered in astonishment.

"Why, their Duchess H  l  ne! If they think I'm going to play G  raldine, a part with nothing in it, a scene and nothing besides—if they think that! Besides, that isn't the reason. The fact is I've had enough of courtesans. Why, there's no end to 'em! They'll be fancying I've got 'em on the brain; to be sure they will! Besides, when all's said and done, it's annoying, for I can quite see they seem to think me uneducated. Well, my boy, they're jolly well in the dark about it, I can tell you! When I want to be a perfect lady, why then I am a swell, and no mistake! Just look at this."

And she withdrew as far as the window and then came swelling back with the mincing gait and circumspect air of a portly hen that fears to dirty her claws. As to Muffat, he followed her movements with eyes still wet with tears. He was stupefied by this sudden transition from anguish to comedy. She walked about for a moment or two in order the more thoroughly to show off her paces, and as she walked she smiled subtly, closed her eyes demurely and managed her skirts with great dexterity. Then she posted herself in front of him again.

"I guess I've hit it, eh?"

"Oh, thoroughly," he stammered with a broken voice and a troubled expression.

"I tell you I've got hold of the honest woman! I've tried at my own place. Nobody's got my little knack of looking like a duchess who don't care a damn for the men. Did you notice it when I passed in front of you? Why, the thing's in my blood! Besides, I want to play the part of an honest woman. I dream about it day and night—I'm miserable about it. I must have the part, d'you hear?"

And with that she grew serious, speaking in a hard voice and looking deeply moved, for she was really tortured by her stupid, tiresome wish. Muffat, still smarting from her late refusals, sat on without appearing to grasp her meaning. There was a silence during which the very flies abstained from buzzing through the quiet, empty place.

"Now, look here," she resumed bluntly, "you're to get them to give me the part."

He was dumfounded, and with a despairing gesture:

"Oh, it's impossible! You yourself were saying just now that it didn't depend on me."

She interrupted him with a shrug of the shoulders.

"You'll just go down, and you'll tell Bordenave you want the part. Now don't be such a silly! Bordenave wants money—well, you'll lend him some, since you can afford to make ducks and drakes of it."

And as he still struggled to refuse her, she grew angry.

"Very well, I understand; you're afraid of making Rose angry. I didn't mention the woman when you were crying down on the floor—I should have had too much to say about it all. Yes, to be sure, when one has sworn to love a woman forever one doesn't usually take up with the first creature that comes by directly after. Oh, that's where the shoe pinches, I remember! Well, dear boy, there's nothing very savory in the Mignon's leavings! Oughtn't you to have broken it off with that dirty lot before coming and squirming on my knees?"

He protested vaguely and at last was able to get out a phrase.

"Oh, I don't care a jot for Rose; I'll give her up at once."

Nana seemed satisfied on this point. She continued:

"Well then, what's bothering you? Bordenave's master here. You'll tell me there's Fauchery after Bordenave—"

She had sunk her voice, for she was coming to the delicate part of the matter. Muffat sat silent, his eyes fixed on the ground. He had remained voluntarily ignorant of Fauchery's assiduous attentions to the countess, and time had lulled his suspicions and set him hoping that he had been deceiving himself during that fearful night passed in a doorway of the Rue Taitbout. But he still felt a dull, angry repugnance to the man.

"Well, what then? Fauchery isn't the devil!" Nana repeated, feeling her way cautiously and trying to find out how matters stood between husband and lover. "One can get over his soft side. I promise you, he's a good sort at bottom! So it's a bargain, eh? You'll tell him that it's for my sake?"

The idea of taking such a step disgusted the count.

"No, no! Never!" he cried.

She paused, and this sentence was on the verge of utterance:

"Fauchery can refuse you nothing."

But she felt that by way of argument it was rather too much of a good thing. So she only smiled a queer smile which spoke as plainly as words. Muffat had raised his eyes to her and now once more lowered them, looking pale and full of embarrassment.

"Ah, you're not good natured," she muttered at last.

"I cannot," he said with a voice and a look of the utmost anguish. "I'll do whatever you like, but not that, dear love! Oh, I beg you not to insist on that!"

Thereupon she wasted no more time in discussion but took his head between her small hands, pushed it back a little, bent down and glued her mouth to his in a long, long kiss. He shivered violently; he trembled beneath her touch; his eyes were closed, and he was beside himself. She lifted him to his feet.

"Go," said she simply.

He walked off, making toward the door. But as he passed out she took him in her arms again, became meek and coaxing, lifted her face to his and rubbed her cheek against his waistcoat, much as a cat might have done.

"Where's the fine house?" she whispered in laughing embarrassment, like a little girl who returns to the pleasant things she has previously refused.

"In the Avenue de Villiers."

"And there are carriages there?"

"Yes."

"Lace? Diamonds?"

"Yes."

"Oh, how good you are, my old pet! You know it was all jealousy just now! And this time I solemnly promise you it won't be like the first, for now you understand what's due to a woman. You give all, don't you? Well then, I don't want anybody but you! Why, look here, there's some more for you! There and there *and* there!"

When she had pushed him from the room after firing his blood with a rain of kisses on hands and on face, she panted awhile. Good heavens, what an unpleasant smell there was in that slut Mathilde's dressing room! It was warm, if you will, with the tranquil warmth peculiar to rooms in the south when the winter sun shines into them, but really, it smelled far too strong of stale lavender water, not to mention other less cleanly things! She opened the window and, again leaning on the window sill, began watching the glass roof of the passage below in order to kill time.

Muffat went staggering downstairs. His head was swimming. What should he say? How should he broach the matter which, moreover, did not concern him? He heard sounds of quarreling as he reached the stage. The second act was being finished, and Prullière was beside himself with wrath, owing to an attempt on Fauchery's part to cut short one of his speeches.

"Cut it all out then," he was shouting. "I should prefer that! Just fancy, I haven't two hundred lines, and they're still cutting me down. No, by Jove, I've had enough of it; I give the part up."

He took a little crumpled manuscript book out of his pocket and fingered its leaves feverishly, as though he were just about to throw it on Cossard's lap. His pale face was convulsed by outraged vanity; his lips were drawn and thin, his eyes flamed; he was quite unable to conceal the struggle that was going on inside him. To think that he, Prullière, the idol of the public, should play a part of only two hundred lines!

"Why not make me bring in letters on a tray?" he continued bitterly.

"Come, come, Prullière, behave decently," said Bordenave, who was anxious to treat him tenderly because of his influence over the boxes. "Don't begin making a fuss. We'll find some points. Eh, Fauchery, you'll add some points? In the third act it would even be possible to lengthen a scene out."

"Well then, I want the last speech of all," the comedian declared. "I certainly deserve to have it."

Fauchery's silence seemed to give consent, and Prullière, still greatly agi-

tated and discontented despite everything, put his part back into his pocket. Bosc and Fontan had appeared profoundly indifferent during the course of this explanation. Let each man fight for his own hand, they reflected; the present dispute had nothing to do with them; they had no interest therein! All the actors clustered round Fauchery and began questioning him and fishing for praise, while Mignon listened to the last of Prullière's complaints without, however, losing sight of Count Muffat, whose return he had been on the watch for.

Entering in the half-light, the count had paused at the back of the stage, for he hesitated to interrupt the quarrel. But Bordenave caught sight of him and ran forward.

"Aren't they a pretty lot?" he muttered. "You can have no idea what I've got to undergo with that lot, Monsieur le Comte. Each man's vainer than his neighbor, and they're wretched players all the same, a scabby lot, always mixed up in some dirty business or other! Oh, they'd be delighted if I were to come to smash. But I beg pardon—I'm getting beside myself."

He ceased speaking, and silence reigned while Muffat sought how to broach his announcement gently. But he failed and, in order to get out of his difficulty the more quickly, ended by an abrupt announcement:

"Nana wants the duchess's part."

Bordenave gave a start and shouted:

"Come now, it's sheer madness!"

Then looking at the count and finding him so pale and so shaken, he was calm at once.

"Devil take it!" he said simply.

And with that there ensued a fresh silence. At bottom he didn't care a pin about it. That great thing Nana playing the duchess might possibly prove amusing! Besides, now that this had happened he had Muffat well in his grasp. Accordingly he was not long in coming to a decision, and so he turned round and called out:

"Fauchery!"

The count had been on the point of stopping him. But Fauchery did not hear him, for he had been pinned against the curtain by Fontan and was being compelled to listen patiently to the comedian's reading of the part of Tardiveau. Fontan imagined Tardiveau to be a native of Marseilles with a dialect, and he imitated the dialect. He was repeating whole speeches. Was that right? Was this the thing? Apparently he was only submitting ideas to Fauchery of which he was himself uncertain, but as the author seemed cold and raised various objections, he grew angry at once.

Oh, very well, the moment the spirit of the part escaped him it would be better for all concerned that he shouldn't act it at all!

"Fauchery!" shouted Bordenave once more.

Thereupon the young man ran off, delighted to escape from the actor, who was wounded not a little by his prompt retreat.

"Don't let's stay here," continued Bordenave. "Come this way, gentlemen."

In order to escape from curious listeners he led them into the property

room behind the scenes, while Mignon watched their disappearance in some surprise. They went down a few steps and entered a square room, whose two windows opened upon the courtyard. A faint light stole through the dirty panes and hung wanly under the low ceiling. In pigeonholes and shelves, which filled the whole place up, lay a collection of the most varied kind of bric-a-brac. Indeed, it suggested an old-clothes shop in the Rue de Lappe in process of selling off, so indescribable was the hotchpotch of plates, gilt pasteboard cups, old red umbrellas, Italian jars, clocks in all styles, platters and inkpots, firearms and squirts, which lay chipped and broken and in unrecognizable heaps under a layer of dust an inch deep. An unendurable odor of old iron, rags and damp cardboard emanated from the various piles, where the debris of forgotten dramas had been collecting for half a century.

"Come in," Bordenave repeated. "We shall be alone, at any rate."

The count was extremely embarrassed, and he contrived to let the manager risk his proposal for him. Fauchery was astonished.

"Eh? What?" he asked.

"Just this," said Bordenave finally. "An idea has occurred to us. Now whatever you do, don't jump! It's most serious. What do you think of Nana for the duchess's part?"

The author was bewildered; then he burst out with:

"Ah no, no! You're joking, aren't you? People would laugh far too much."

"Well, and it's a point gained already if they do laugh! Just reflect, my dear boy. The idea pleases Monsieur le Comte very much."

In order to keep himself in countenance Muffat had just picked out of the dust on a neighboring shelf an object which he did not seem to recognize. It was an eggcup, and its stem had been mended with plaster. He kept hold of it unconsciously and came forward, muttering:

"Yes, yes, it would be capital."

Fauchery turned toward him with a brisk, impatient gesture. The count had nothing to do with his piece, and he said decisively:

"Never! Let Nana play the courtesan as much as she likes, but a lady— No, by Jove!"

"You are mistaken, I assure you," rejoined the count, growing bolder. "This very minute she has been playing the part of a pure woman for my benefit."

"Where?" queried Fauchery with growing surprise.

"Upstairs in a dressing room. Yes, she has, indeed, and with such distinction! She's got a way of glancing at you as she goes by you—something like this, you know!"

And eggcup in hand, he endeavored to imitate Nana, quite forgetting his dignity in his frantic desire to convince the others. Fauchery gazed at him in a state of stupefaction. He understood it all now, and his anger had ceased. The count felt that he was looking at him mockingly and pityingly, and he passed with a slight blush on his face.

"Egad, it's quite possible!" muttered the author complaisantly. "Perhaps she would do very well, only the part's been assigned. We can't take it away from Rose."

"Oh, if that's all the trouble," said Bordenave, "I'll undertake to arrange matters."

But presently, seeing them both against him and guessing that Bordenave had some secret interest at stake, the young man thought to avoid acquiescence by redoubling the violence of his refusal. The consultation was on the verge of being broken up.

"Oh, dear! No, no! Even if the part were unassigned I should never give it her! There, is that plain? Do let me alone; I have no wish to ruin my play!"

He lapsed into silent embarrassment. Bordenave, deeming himself *de trop*, went away, but the count remained with bowed head. He raised it with an effort and said in a breaking voice:

"Supposing, my dear fellow, I were to ask this of you as a favor?"

"I cannot, I cannot," Fauchery kept repeating as he writhed to get free. Muffat's voice became harder.

"I pray and beseech you for it! I want it!"

And with that he fixed his eyes on him. The young man read menaces in that darkling gaze and suddenly gave way with a splutter of confused phrases:

"Do what you like—I don't care a pin about it. Yes, yes, you're abusing your power, but you'll see, you'll see!"

At this the embarrassment of both increased. Fauchery was leaning up against a set of shelves and was tapping nervously on the ground with his foot. Muffat seemed busy examining the eggcup, which he was still turning round and about.

"It's an eggcup," Bordenave obligingly came and remarked.

"Yes, to be sure! It's an eggcup," the count repeated.

"Excuse me, you're covered with dust," continued the manager, putting the thing back on a shelf. "If one had to dust every day there'd be no end to it, you understand. But it's hardly clean here—a filthy mess, eh? Yet you may believe me or not when I tell you there's money in it. Now look, just look at all that!"

He walked Muffat round in front of the pigeonholes and shelves and in the greenish light which filtered through the courtyard, told him the names of different properties, for he was anxious to interest him in his marine-stores inventory, as he jocosely termed it.

Presently, when they had returned into Fauchery's neighborhood, he said carelessly enough:

"Listen, since we're all of one mind, we'll finish the matter at once. Here's Mignon, just when he's wanted."

For some little time past Mignon had been prowling in the adjoining passage, and the very moment Bordenave began talking of a modification of their agreement he burst into wrathful protest. It was infamous—they wanted to spoil his wife's career—he'd go to law about it! Bordenave, meanwhile, was extremely calm and full of reasons. He did not think the part worthy of Rose, and he preferred to reserve her for an operetta, which was to be put on after the *Pette Duchesse*. But when her husband still continued shouting he suddenly offered to cancel their arrangement in view of the offers which the

Folies-Dramatiques had been making the singer. At this Mignon was momentarily put out, so without denying the truth of these offers he loudly professed a vast disdain for money. His wife, he said, had been engaged to play the Duchess Hélène, and she would play the part even if he, Mignon, were to be ruined over it. His dignity, his honor, were at stake! Starting from this basis, the discussion grew interminable. The manager, however, always returned to the following argument: since the Folies had offered Rose three hundred francs a night during a hundred performances, and since she only made a hundred and fifty with him, she would be the gainer by fifteen thousand francs the moment he let her depart. The husband, on his part, did not desert the artist's position. What would people say if they saw his wife deprived of her part? Why, that she was not equal to it; that it had been deemed necessary to find a substitute for her! And this would do great harm to Rose's reputation as an artist; nay, it would diminish it. Oh no, no! Glory before gain! Then without a word of warning he pointed out a possible arrangement: Rose, according to the terms of her agreement, was pledged to pay a forfeit of ten thousand francs in case she gave up the part. Very well then, let them give her ten thousand francs, and she would go to the Folies-Dramatiques. Bordenave was utterly dumfounded while Mignon, who had never once taken his eyes off the count, tranquilly awaited results.

"Then everything can be settled," murmured Muffat in tones of relief; "we can come to an understanding."

"The deuce, no! That would be too stupid!" cried Bordenave, mastered by his commercial instincts. "Ten thousand francs to let Rose go! Why, people would make game of me!"

But the count, with a multiplicity of nods, bade him accept. He hesitated, and at last with much grumbling and infinite regret over the ten thousand francs which, by the by, were not destined to come out of his own pocket he bluntly continued:

"After all, I consent. At any rate, I shall have you off my hands."

For a quarter of an hour past Fontan had been listening in the courtyard. Such had been his curiosity that he had come down and posted himself there, but the moment he understood the state of the case he went upstairs again and enjoyed the treat of telling Rose. Dear me! They were just haggling in her behalf! He dinned his words into her ears; she ran off to the property room. They were silent as she entered. She looked at the four men. Muffat hung his head; Fauchery answered her questioning glance with a despairing shrug of the shoulders; as to Mignon, he was busy discussing the terms of the agreement with Bordenave.

"What's up?" she demanded curtly.

"Nothing," said her husband. "Bordenave here is giving ten thousand francs in order to get you to give up your part."

She grew tremulous with anger and very pale, and she clenched her little fists. For some moments she stared at him, her whole nature in revolt. Ordinarily in matters of business she was wont to trust everything obediently to

her husband, leaving him to sign agreements with managers and lovers. Now she could but cry:

"Oh, come, you're too base for anything!"

The words fell like a lash. Then she sped away, and Mignon, in utter astonishment, ran after her. What next? Was she going mad? He began explaining to her in low tones that ten thousand francs from one party and fifteen thousand from the other came to twenty-five thousand. A splendid deal! Muffat was getting rid of her in every sense of the word; it was a pretty trick to have plucked him of this last feather! But Rose in her anger vouchsafed no answer. Whereupon Mignon in disdain left her to her feminine spite and, turning to Bordenave, who was once more on the stage with Fauchery and Muffat, said:

"We'll sign tomorrow morning. Have the money in readiness."

At this moment Nana, to whom Labordette had brought the news, came down to the stage in triumph. She was quite the honest woman now and wore a most distinguished expression in order to overwhelm her friends and prove to the idiots that when she chose she could give them all points in the matter of smartness. But she nearly got into trouble, for at the sight of her Rose darted forward, choking with rage and stuttering:

"Yes, you, I'll pay you out! Things can't go on like this; d'you understand?"

Nana forgot herself in face of this brisk attack and was going to put her arms akimbo and give her what for. But she controlled herself and, looking like a marquise who is afraid of treading on an orange peel, fluted in still more silvery tones.

"Eh, what?" said she. "You're mad, my dear!"

And with that she continued in her graceful affectation while Rose took her departure, followed by Mignon, who now refused to recognize her. Clarisse was enraptured, having just obtained the part of Géraldine from Bordenave. Fauchery, on the other hand, was gloomy; he shifted from one foot to the other; he could not decide whether to leave the theater or no. His piece was bedeviled, and he was seeking how best to save it. But Nana came up, took him by both hands and, drawing him toward her, asked whether he thought her so very atrocious after all. She wasn't going to eat his play—not she! Then she made him laugh and gave him to understand that he would be foolish to be angry with her, in view of his relationship to the Muffats. If, she said, her memory failed her she would take her lines from the prompter. The house, too, would be packed in such a way as to ensure applause. Besides, he was mistaken about her, and he would soon see how she would rattle through her part. By and by it was arranged that the author should make a few changes in the role of the duchess so as to extend that of Prullière. The last-named personage was enraptured. Indeed, amid all the joy which Nana now quite naturally diffused, Fontan alone remained unmoved. In the middle of the yellow lamplight, against which the sharp outline of his goatlike profile shone out with great distinctness, he stood showing off his figure and affecting the pose of one who has been cruelly abandoned. Nana went quietly up and took hands with him.

"How are you getting on?"

"Oh, pretty fairly. And how are you?"

"Very well, thank you."

That was all. They seemed to have only parted at the doors of the theater the day before. Meanwhile the players were waiting about, but Bordenave said that the third act would not be rehearsed. And so it chanced that old Bosc went grumbling away at the proper time, whereas usually the company were needlessly detained and lost whole afternoons in consequence. Everyone went off. Down on the pavement they were blinded by the broad daylight and stood blinking their eyes in a dazed sort of way, as became people who had passed three hours squabbling with tight-strung nerves in the depths of a cellar. The count, with racked limbs and vacant brain, got into a conveyance with Nana, while Labordette took Fauchery off and comforted him.

A month later the first night of the *Petite Duchesse* proved supremely disastrous to Nana. She was atrociously bad and displayed such pretensions toward high comedy that the public grew mirthful. They did not hiss—they were too amused. From a stage box Rose Mignon kept greeting her rival's successive entrances with a shrill laugh, which set the whole house off. It was the beginning of her revenge. Accordingly, when at night Nana, greatly chagrined, found herself alone with Muffat, she said furiously:

"What a conspiracy, eh? It's all owing to jealousy. Oh, if they only knew how I despise 'em! What do I want them for nowadays? Look here! I'll bet a hundred louis that I'll bring all those who made fun today and make 'em lick the ground at my feet! Yes, I'll fine-lady your Paris for you, I will!"

CHAPTER X

THEREUPON Nana became a smart woman, mistress of all that is foolish and filthy in man, marquise in the ranks of her calling. It was a sudden but decisive start, a plunge into the garish day of gallant notoriety and mad expenditure and that daredevil wastefulness peculiar to beauty. She at once became queen among the most expensive of her kind. Her photographs were displayed in shopwindows, and she was mentioned in the papers. When she drove in her carriage along the boulevards the people would turn and tell one another who that was with all the unction of a nation saluting its sovereign, while the object of their adoration lolled easily back in her diaphanous dresses and smiled gaily under the rain of little golden curls which ran riot above the blue of her made-up eyes and the red of her painted lips. And the wonder of wonders was that the great creature, who was so awkward on the stage, so very absurd the moment she sought to act the chaste woman, was able without effort to assume the role of an enchantress in the outer world. Her movements were lithe as a serpent's, and the studied and yet seemingly involuntary carelessness with which she dressed was really exquisite in its elegance. There was a nervous distinction in all she did which suggested a wellborn Persian cat; she was an aristocrat in vice and proudly and rebelliously trampled upon a

prostrate Paris like a sovereign whom none dare disobey. She set the fashion, and great ladies imitated her.

Nana's fine house was situated at the corner of the Rue Cardinet, in the Avenue de Villiers. The avenue was part of the luxurious quarter at that time springing up in the vague district which had once been the Plaine Monceau. The house had been built by a young painter, who was intoxicated by a first success, and had been perforce resold almost as soon as it was habitable. It was in the palatial Renaissance manner and had fantastic interior arrangements which consisted of modern conveniences framed in a setting of somewhat artificial originality. Count Muffat had bought the house ready furnished and full of hosts of beautiful objects—lovely Eastern hangings, old credences, huge chairs of the Louis XIII epoch. And thus Nana had come into artistic surroundings of the choicest kind and of the most extravagantly various dates. But since the studio, which occupied the central portion of the house, could not be of any use to her, she had upset existing arrangements, establishing a small drawing room on the first floor, next to her bedroom and dressing room, and leaving a conservatory, a large drawing room and a dining room to look after themselves underneath. She astonished the architect with her ideas, for, as became a Parisian workgirl who understands the elegancies of life by instinct, she had suddenly developed a very pretty taste for every species of luxurious refinement. Indeed, she did not spoil her house overmuch; nay, she even added to the richness of the furniture, save here and there, where certain traces of tender foolishness and vulgar magnificence betrayed the ex-flower seller who had been wont to dream in front of shopwindows in the arcades.

A carpet was spread on the steps beneath the great awning over the front door in the court, and the moment you entered the hall you were greeted by a perfume as of violets and a soft, warm atmosphere which thick hangings helped to produce. A window, whose yellow- and rose-colored panes suggested the warm pallor of human flesh, gave light to the wide staircase, at the foot of which a Negro in carved wood held out a silver tray full of visiting cards and four white marble women, with bosoms displayed, raised lamps in their uplifted hands. Bronzes and Chinese vases full of flowers, divans covered with old Persian rugs, armchairs upholstered in old tapestry, furnished the entrance hall, adorned the stairheads and gave the first-floor landing the appearance of an anteroom. Here men's overcoats and hats were always in evidence, and there were thick hangings which deadened every sound. It seemed a place apart: on entering it you might have fancied yourself in a chapel, whose very air was thrilling with devotion, whose very silence and seclusion were fraught with mystery.

Nana only opened the large and somewhat too-sumptuous Louis XVI drawing room on those gala nights when she received society from the Tuileries or strangers of distinction. Ordinarily she only came downstairs at mealtimes, and she would feel rather lost on such days as she lunched by herself in the lofty dining room with its Gobelin tapestry and its monumental sideboard, adorned with old porcelain and marvelous pieces of ancient plate. She used to go upstairs again as quickly as possible, for her home was on the first floor,

in the three rooms, the bed, dressing and small drawing room above described. Twice already she had done the bedchamber up anew: on the first occasion in mauve satin, on the second in blue silk under lace. But she had not been satisfied with this; it had struck her as "nohowish," and she was still unsuccessfully seeking for new colors and designs. On the elaborately upholstered bed, which was as low as a sofa, there were twenty thousand francs' worth of *point de Venise* lace. The furniture was lacquered blue and white under designs in silver filigree, and everywhere lay such numbers of white bearskins that they hid the carpet. This was a luxurious caprice on Nana's part, she having never been able to break herself of the habit of sitting on the floor to take her stockings off. Next door to the bedroom the little saloon was full of an amusing medley of exquisitely artistic objects. Against the hangings of pale rose-colored silk—a faded Turkish rose color, embroidered with gold thread—a whole world of them stood sharply outlined. They were from every land and in every possible style. There were Italian cabinets, Spanish and Portuguese coffers, models of Chinese pagodas, a Japanese screen of precious workmanship, besides china, bronzes, embroidered silks, hangings of the finest needlework. Armchairs wide as beds and sofas deep as alcoves suggested voluptuous idleness and the somnolent life of the seraglio. The prevailing tone of the room was old gold blended with green and red, and nothing it contained too forcibly indicated the presence of the courtesan save the luxuriousness of the seats. Only two "biscuit" statuettes, a woman in her shift, hunting for fleas, and another with nothing at all on, walking on her hands and waving her feet in the air, sufficed to sully the room with a note of stupid originality.

Through a door, which was nearly always ajar, the dressing room was visible. It was all in marble and glass with a white bath, silver jugs and basins and crystal and ivory appointments. A drawn curtain filled the place with a clear twilight which seemed to slumber in the warm scent of violets, that suggestive perfume peculiar to Nana wherewith the whole house, from the roof to the very courtyard, was penetrated.

The furnishing of the house was a most important undertaking. Nana certainly had Zoé with her, that girl so devoted to her fortunes. For months she had been tranquilly awaiting this abrupt, new departure, as became a woman who was certain of her powers of prescience, and now she was triumphant; she was mistress of the house and was putting by a round sum while serving Madame as honestly as possible. But a solitary lady's maid was no longer sufficient. A butler, a coachman, a porter and a cook were wanted. Besides, it was necessary to fill the stables. It was then that Labordette made himself most useful. He undertook to perform all sorts of errands which bored the count; he made a comfortable job of the purchase of horses; he visited the coachbuilders; he guided the young woman in her choice of things. She was to be met with at the shops, leaning on his arm. Labordette even got in the servants—Charles, a great, tall coachman, who had been in service with the Duc de Corbreuse; Julien, a little, smiling, much-becurled butler, and a married couple, of whom the wife Victorine became cook while the husband François

was taken on as porter and footman. The last mentioned in powder and breeches wore Nana's livery, which was a sky-blue one adorned with silver lace, and he received visitors in the hall. The whole thing was princely in the correctness of its style.

At the end of two months the house was set going. The cost had been more than three hundred thousand francs. There were eight horses in the stables, and five carriages in the coach houses, and of these five one was a landau with silver embellishments, which for the moment occupied the attention of all Paris. And amid this great wealth Nana began settling down and making her nest. After the third representation of the *Petite Duchesse* she had quitted the theater, leaving Bordenave to struggle on against a bankruptcy which, despite the count's money, was imminent. Nevertheless, she was still bitter about her failure. It added to that other bitterness, the lesson Fontan had given her, a shameful lesson for which she held all men responsible. Accordingly she now declared herself very firm and quite proof against sudden infatuations, but thoughts of vengeance took no hold of her volatile brain. What did maintain a hold on it in the hours when she was not indignant was an ever-wakeful lust of expenditure, added to a natural contempt for the man who paid and to a perpetual passion for consumption and waste, which took pride in the ruin of her lovers.

At starting Nana put the count on a proper footing and clearly mapped out the conditions of their relationship. The count gave twelve thousand francs monthly, presents excepted, and demanded nothing in return save absolute fidelity. She swore fidelity but insisted also on being treated with the utmost consideration, on enjoying complete liberty as mistress of the house and on having her every wish respected. For instance, she was to receive her friends every day, and he was to come only at stated times. In a word, he was to repose a blind confidence in her in everything. And when he was seized with jealous anxiety and hesitated to grant what she wanted, she stood on her dignity and threatened to give him back all he had given or even swore by little Louiset to perform what she promised. This was to suffice him. There was no love where mutual esteem was wanting. At the end of the first month Muffat respected her.

But she desired and obtained still more. Soon she began to influence him, as became a good-natured courtesan. When he came to her in a moody condition she cheered him up, confessed him and then gave him good advice. Little by little she interested herself in the annoyances of his home life, in his wife, in his daughter, in his love affairs and financial difficulties; she was very sensible, very fair and right-minded. On one occasion only did she let anger get the better of her, and that was when he confided to her that doubtless Daguenet was going to ask for his daughter Estelle in marriage. When the count began making himself notorious Daguenet had thought it a wise move to break off with Nana. He had treated her like a base hussy and had sworn to snatch his future father-in-law out of the creature's clutches. In return Nana abused her old Mimi in a charming fashion. He was a renegade who had devoured his fortune in the company of vile women; he had no moral

sense. True, he did not let them pay him money, but he profited by that of others and only repaid them at rare intervals with a bouquet or a dinner. And when the count seemed inclined to find excuses for these failings she bluntly informed him that Daguenet had enjoyed her favors, and she added disgusting particulars. Muffat had grown ashen-pale. There was no question of the young man now. This would teach him to be lacking in gratitude!

Meanwhile the house had not been entirely furnished, when one evening after she had lavished the most energetic promises of fidelity on Muffat Nana kept the Count Xavier de Vandevres for the night. For the last fortnight he had been paying her assiduous court, visiting her and sending presents of flowers, and now she gave way not so much out of sudden infatuation as to prove that she was a free woman. The idea of gain followed later when, the day after, Vandevres helped her to pay a bill which she did not wish to mention to the other man. From Vandevres she would certainly derive from eight to ten thousand francs a month, and this would prove very useful as pocket money. In those days he was finishing the last of his fortune in an access of burning, feverish folly. His horses and Lucy had devoured three of his farms, and at one gulp Nana was going to swallow his last château, near Amiens. He seemed in a hurry to sweep everything away, down to the ruins of the old tower built by a Vandevres under Philip Augustus. He was mad for ruin and thought it a great thing to leave the last golden bezants of his coat of arms in the grasp of this courtesan, whom the world of Paris desired. He, too, accepted Nana's conditions, leaving her entire freedom of action and claiming her caresses only on certain days. He was not even naïvely impassioned enough to require her to make vows. Muffat suspected nothing. As to Vandevres, he knew things would take place for a certainty, but he never made the least allusion to them and pretended total ignorance, while his lips wore the subtle smile of the skeptical man of pleasure who does not seek the impossible, provided he can have his day and that Paris is aware of it.

From that time forth Nana's house was really properly appointed. The staff of servants was complete in the stable, in the kitchen and in my lady's chamber. Zoé organized everything and passed successfully through the most unforeseen difficulties. The household moved as easily as the scenery in a theater and was regulated like a grand administrative concern. Indeed, it worked with such precision that during the early months there were no jars and no derangements. Madame, however, pained Zoé extremely with her imprudent acts, her sudden fits of unwisdom, her mad bravado. Still the lady's maid grew gradually lenient, for she had noticed that she made increased profits in seasons of wanton waste when Madame had committed a folly which must be made up for. It was then that the presents began raining on her, and she fished up many a louis out of the troubled waters.

One morning when Muffat had not yet left the bedroom Zoé ushered a gentleman into the dressing room, where Nana was changing her underwear. He was trembling violently.

"Good gracious! It's Zizi!" said the young woman in great astonishment.

It was, indeed, Georges. But when he saw her in her shift, with her golden

hair over her bare shoulders, he threw his arms round her neck and round her waist and kissed her in all directions. She began struggling to get free, for she was frightened, and in smothered tones she stammered:

"Do leave off! He's there! Oh, it's silly of you! And you, Zoé, are you out of your senses? Take him away and keep him downstairs; I'll try and come down."

Zoé had to push him in front of her. When Nana was able to rejoin them in the drawing room downstairs she scolded them both, and Zoé pursed up her lips and took her departure with a vexed expression, remarking that she had only been anxious to give Madame a pleasure. Georges was so glad to see Nana again and gazed at her with such delight that his fine eyes began filling with tears. The miserable days were over now; his mother believed him to have grown reasonable and had allowed him to leave Les Fondettes. Accordingly, the moment he had reached the terminus, he had got a conveyance in order the more quickly to come and kiss his sweet darling. He spoke of living at her side in future, as he used to do down in the country when he waited for her, barefooted, in the bedroom at La Mignotte. And as he told her about himself, he let his fingers creep forward, for he longed to touch her after that cruel year of separation. Then he got possession of her hands, felt about the wide sleeves of her dressing jacket, traveled up as far as her shoulders.

"You still love your baby?" he asked in his child voice.

"Oh, I certainly love him!" answered Nana, briskly getting out of his clutches. "But you come popping in without warning. You know, my little man, I'm not my own mistress; you must be good!"

Georges, when he got out of his cab, had been so dizzy with the feeling that his long desire was at last about to be satisfied that he had not even noticed what sort of house he was entering. But now he became conscious of a change in the things around him. He examined the sumptuous dining room with its lofty decorated ceiling, its Gobelin hangings, its buffet blazing with plate.

"Yes, yes!" he remarked sadly.

And with that she made him understand that he was never to come in the mornings but between four and six in the afternoon, if he cared to. That was her reception time. Then as he looked at her with suppliant, questioning eyes and craved no boon at all, she, in her turn, kissed him on the forehead in the most amiable way.

"Be very good," she whispered. "I'll do all I can."

But the truth was that this remark now meant nothing. She thought Georges very nice and would have liked him as a companion, but as nothing else. Nevertheless, when he arrived daily at four o'clock he seemed so wretched that she was often fain to be as compliant as of old and would hide him in cupboards and constantly allow him to pick up the crumbs from Beauty's table. He hardly ever left the house now and became as much one of its inmates as the little dog Bijou. Together they nestled among Mistress's skirts and enjoyed a little of her at a time, even when she was with another man,

while doles of sugar and stray caresses not seldom fell to their share in her hours of loneliness and boredom.

Doubtless Mme Hugon found out that the lad had again returned to that wicked woman's arms, for she hurried up to Paris and came and sought aid from her other son, the Lieutenant Philippe, who was then in garrison at Vincennes. Georges, who was hiding from his elder brother, was seized with despairing apprehension, for he feared the latter might adopt violent tactics, and as his tenderness for Nana was so nervously expansive that he could not keep anything from her, he soon began talking of nothing but his big brother, a great, strong fellow, who was capable of all kinds of things.

"You know," he explained, "Mamma won't come to you while she can send my brother. Oh, she'll certainly send Philippe to fetch me."

The first time he said this Nana was deeply wounded. She said frigidly:

"Gracious me, I should like to see him come! For all that he's a lieutenant in the army, François will chuck him out in double-quick time!"

Soon, as the lad kept returning to the subject of his brother, she ended by taking a certain interest in Philippe, and in a week's time she knew him from head to foot—knew him as very tall and very strong and merry and somewhat rough. She learned intimate details, too, and found out that he had hair on his arms and a birthmark on his shoulder. So thoroughly did she learn her lesson that one day, when she was full of the image of the man who was to be turned out of doors by her orders, she cried out:

"I say, Zizi, your brother's not coming. He's a base deserter!"

The next day, when Georges and Nana were alone together, François came upstairs to ask whether Madame would receive Lieutenant Philippe Hugon. Georges grew extremely white and murmured:

"I suspected it; Mamma was talking about it this morning."

And he besought the young woman to send down word that she could not see visitors. But she was already on her feet and seemed all aflame as she said:

"Why should I not see him? He would think me afraid. Dear me, we'll have a good laugh! Just leave the gentleman in the drawing room for a quarter of an hour, François; afterward bring him up to me."

She did not sit down again but began pacing feverishly to and fro between the fireplace and a Venetian mirror hanging above an Italian chest. And each time she reached the latter she glanced at the glass and tried the effect of a smile, while Georges sat nervously on a sofa, trembling at the thought of the coming scene. As she walked up and down she kept jerking out such little phrases as:

"It will calm the fellow down if he has to wait a quarter of an hour. Besides, if he thinks he's calling on a tottie the drawing room will stun him! Yes, yes, have a good look at everything, my fine fellow! It isn't imitation, and it'll teach you to respect the lady who owns it. Respect's what men need to feel! The quarter of an hour's gone by, eh? No? Only ten minutes? Oh, we've got plenty of time."

She did not stay where she was, however. At the end of the quarter of an hour she sent Georges away after making him solemnly promise not to listen

at the door, as such conduct would scarcely look proper in case the servants saw him. As he went into her bedroom Zizi ventured in a choking sort of way to remark:

"It's my brother, you know—"

"Don't you fear," she said with much dignity; "if he's polite I'll be polite."

François ushered in Philippe Hugon, who wore morning dress. Georges began crossing on tiptoe on the other side of the room, for he was anxious to obey the young woman. But the sound of voices retained him, and he hesitated in such anguish of mind that his knees gave way under him. He began imagining that a dread catastrophe would befall, that blows would be struck, that something abominable would happen, which would make Nana everlastingly odious to him. And so he could not withstand the temptation to come back and put his ear against the door. He heard very ill, for the thick portieres deadened every sound, but he managed to catch certain words spoken by Philippe, stern phrases in which such terms as "mere child," "family," "honor," were distinctly audible. He was so anxious about his darling's possible answers that his heart beat violently and filled his head with a confused, buzzing noise. She was sure to give vent to a "Dirty blackguard!" or to a "Leave me bloody well alone! I'm in my own house!" But nothing happened—not a breath came from her direction. Nana seemed dead in there! Soon even his brother's voice grew gentler, and he could not make it out at all, when a strange murmuring sound finally stupefied him. Nana was sobbing! For a moment or two he was the prey of contending feelings and knew not whether to run away or to fall upon Philippe. But just then Zoé came into the room, and he withdrew from the door, ashamed at being thus surprised.

She began quietly to put some linen away in a cupboard while he stood mute and motionless, pressing his forehead against a windowpane. He was tortured by uncertainty. After a short silence the woman asked:

"It's your brother that's with Madame?"

"Yes," replied the lad in a choking voice.

There was a fresh silence.

"And it makes you anxious, doesn't it, Monsieur Georges?"

"Yes," he rejoined in the same painful, suffering tone.

Zoé was in no hurry. She folded up some lace and said slowly:

"You're wrong; Madame will manage it all."

And then the conversation ended; they said not another word. Still she did not leave the room. A long quarter of an hour passed, and she turned round again without seeming to notice the look of exasperation overspreading the lad's face, which was already white with the effects of uncertainty and constraint. He was casting sidelong glances in the direction of the drawing room.

Maybe Nana was still crying. The other must have grown savage and have dealt her blows. Thus when Zoé finally took her departure he ran to the door and once more pressed his ear against it. He was thunderstruck; his head swam, for he heard a brisk outburst of gaiety, tender, whispering voices and

the smothered giggles of a woman who is being tickled. Besides, almost directly afterward, Nana conducted Philippe to the head of the stairs, and there was an exchange of cordial and familiar phrases.

When Georges again ventured into the drawing room the young woman was standing before the mirror, looking at herself.

"Well?" he asked in utter bewilderment.

"Well, what?" she said without turning round. Then negligently:

"What did you mean? He's very nice, is your brother!"

"So it's all right, is it?"

"Oh, certainly it's all right! Goodness me, what's come over you? One would have thought we were going to fight!"

Georges still failed to understand.

"I thought I heard—that is, you didn't cry?" he stammered out.

"Me cry!" she exclaimed, looking fixedly at him. "Why, you're dreaming! What makes you think I cried?"

Thereupon the lad was treated to a distressing scene for having disobeyed and played Paul Pry behind the door. She sulked, and he returned with coaxing submissiveness to the old subject, for he wished to know all about it.

"And my brother then?"

"Your brother saw where he was at once. You know, I might have been a tottie, in which case his interference would have been accounted for by your age and the family honor! Oh yes, I understand those kinds of feelings! But a single glance was enough for him, and he behaved like a well-bred man at once. So don't be anxious any longer. It's all over—he's gone to quiet your mamma!"

And she went on laughingly:

"For that matter, you'll see your brother here. I've invited him, and he's going to return."

"Oh, he's going to return," said the lad, growing white. He added nothing, and they ceased talking of Philippe. She began dressing to go out, and he watched her with his great, sad eyes. Doubtless he was very glad that matters had got settled, for he would have preferred death to a rupture of their connection, but deep down in his heart there was a silent anguish, a profound sense of pain, which he had no experience of and dared not talk about. How Philippe quieted their mother's fears he never knew, but three days later she returned to Les Fondettes, apparently satisfied. On the evening of her return, at Nana's house, he trembled when François announced the lieutenant, but the latter jested gaily and treated him like a young rascal, whose escapade he had favored as something not likely to have any consequences. The lad's heart was sore within him; he scarcely dared move and blushed girlishly at the least word that was spoken to him. He had not lived much in Philippe's society; he was ten years his junior, and he feared him as he would a father, from whom stories about women are concealed. Accordingly he experienced an uneasy sense of shame when he saw him so free in Nana's company and heard him laugh uproariously, as became a man who was plunging into a life of pleasure with the gusto born of magnificent health. Nevertheless, when his brother

shortly began to present himself every day, Georges ended by getting somewhat used to it all. Nana was radiant.

This, her latest installation, had been involving all the riotous waste attendant on the life of gallantry, and now her housewarming was being defiantly celebrated in a grand mansion positively overflowing with males and with furniture.

One afternoon when the Hugons were there Count Muffat arrived out of hours. But when Zoé told him that Madame was with friends he refused to come in and took his departure discreetly, as became a gallant gentleman. When he made his appearance again in the evening Nana received him with the frigid indignation of a grossly affronted woman.

"Sir," she said, "I have given you no cause why you should insult me. You must understand this: when I am at home to visitors, I beg you to make your appearance just like other people."

The count simply gaped in astonishment. "But, my dear—" he endeavored to explain.

"Perhaps it was because I had visitors! Yes, there were men here, but what d'you suppose I was doing with those men? You only advertise a woman's affairs when you act the discreet lover, and I don't want to be advertised; I don't!"

He obtained his pardon with difficulty, but at bottom he was enchanted. It was with scenes such as these that she kept him in unquestioning and docile submission. She had long since succeeded in imposing Georges on him as a young vagabond who, she declared, amused her. She made him dine with Philippe, and the count behaved with great amiability. When they rose from table he took the young man on one side and asked news of his mother. From that time forth the young Hugons, Vandeuves and Muffat were openly about the house and shook hands as guests and intimates might have done. It was a more convenient arrangement than the previous one. Muffat alone still abstained discreetly from too-frequent visits, thus adhering to the ceremonious policy of an ordinary strange caller. At night when Nana was sitting on her bearskins drawing off her stockings, he would talk amicably about the other three gentlemen and lay especial stress on Philippe, who was loyalty itself.

"It's very true; they're nice," Nana would say as she lingered on the floor to change her shift. "Only, you know, they see what I am. One word about it and I should chuck 'em all out of doors for you!"

Nevertheless, despite her luxurious life and her group of courtiers, Nana was nearly bored to death. She had men for every minute of the night, and money overflowed even among the brushes and combs in the drawers of her dressing table. But all this had ceased to satisfy her; she felt that there was a void somewhere or other, an empty place provocative of yawns. Her life dragged on, devoid of occupation, and successive days only brought back the same monotonous hours. Tomorrow had ceased to be; she lived like a bird: sure of her food and ready to perch and roost on any branch which she came to. This certainty of food and drink left her lolling effortless for whole days, lulled her to sleep in conventual idleness and submission as though she were

the prisoner of her trade. Never going out except to drive, she was losing her walking powers. She reverted to low childish tastes, would kiss Bijou from morning to night and kill time with stupid pleasures while waiting for the man whose caresses she tolerated with an appearance of complaisant lassitude. Amid this species of self-abandonment she now took no thought about anything save her personal beauty; her sole care was to look after herself, to wash and to perfume her limbs, as became one who was proud of being able to undress at any moment and in face of anybody without having to blush for her imperfections.

At ten in the morning Nana would get up. Bijou, the Scotch griffon dog, used to lick her face and wake her, and then would ensue a game of play lasting some five minutes, during which the dog would race about over her arms and legs and cause Count Muffat much distress. Bijou was the first little male he had ever been jealous of. It was not at all proper, he thought, that an animal should go poking its nose under the bedclothes like that! After this Nana would proceed to her dressing room, where she took a bath. Toward eleven o'clock François would come and do up her hair before beginning the elaborate manipulations of the afternoon.

At breakfast, as she hated feeding alone, she nearly always had Mme Maloix at table with her. This lady would arrive from unknown regions in the morning, wearing her extravagantly quaint hats, and would return at night to that mysterious existence of hers, about which no one ever troubled. But the hardest to bear were the two or three hours between lunch and the toilet. On ordinary occasions she proposed a game of bezique to her old friend; on others she would read the *Figaro*, in which the theatrical echoes and the fashionable news interested her. Sometimes she even opened a book, for she fancied herself in literary matters. Her toilet kept her till close on five o'clock, and then only she would wake from her daylong drowse and drive out or receive a whole mob of men at her own house. She would often dine abroad and always go to bed very late, only to rise again on the morrow with the same languor as before and to begin another day, differing in nothing from its predecessor.

The great distraction was to go to the Batignolles and see her little Louis at her aunt's. For a fortnight at a time she forgot all about him, and then would follow an access of maternal love, and she would hurry off on foot with all the modesty and tenderness becoming a good mother. On such occasions she would be the bearer of snuff for her aunt and of oranges and biscuits for the child, the kind of presents one takes to a hospital. Or again she would drive up in her landau on her return from the Bois, decked in costumes, the resplendence of which greatly excited the dwellers in the solitary street. Since her niece's magnificent elevation Mme Lerat had been puffed up with vanity. She rarely presented herself in the Avenue de Villiers, for she was pleased to remark that it wasn't her place to do so, but she enjoyed triumphs in her own street. She was delighted when the young woman arrived in dresses that had cost four or five thousand francs and would be occupied during the whole of the next day in showing off her presents and in citing prices which quite stupefied the neighbors. As often as not, Nana kept Sunday free for the sake of

"her family," and on such occasions, if Muffat invited her, she would refuse with the smile of a good little shopwoman. It was impossible, she would answer; she was dining at her aunt's; she was going to see Baby. Moreover, that poor little man Louiset was always ill. He was almost three years old, growing quite a great boy! But he had had an eczema on the back of his neck, and now concretions were forming in his ears, which pointed, it was feared, to decay of the bones of the skull. When she saw how pale he looked, with his spoiled blood and his flabby flesh all out in yellow patches, she would become serious, but her principal feeling would be one of astonishment. What could be the matter with the little love that he should grow so weakly? She, his mother, was so strong and well!

On the days when her child did not engross attention Nana would again sink back into the noisy monotony of her existence, with its drives in the Bois, first nights at the theater, dinners and suppers at the Maison-d'Or or the Café Anglais, not to mention all the places of public resort, all the spectacles to which crowds rushed—Mabille, the reviews, the races. But whatever happened she still felt that stupid, idle void, which caused her, as it were, to suffer internal cramps. Despite the incessant infatuations that possessed her heart, she would stretch out her arms with a gesture of immense weariness the moment she was left alone. Solitude rendered her low spirited at once, for it brought her face to face with the emptiness and boredom within her. Extremely gay by nature and profession, she became dismal in solitude and would sum up her life in the following ejaculation, which recurred incessantly between her yawns:

"Oh, how the men bother me!"

One afternoon as she was returning home from a concert, Nana, on the sidewalk in the Rue Montmartre, noticed a woman trotting along in down-at-the-heel boots, dirty petticoats and a hat utterly ruined by the rain. She recognized her suddenly.

"Stop, Charles!" she shouted to the coachman and began calling: "Satin, Satin!"

Passers-by turned their heads; the whole street stared. Satin had drawn near and was still further soiling herself against the carriage wheels.

"Do get in, my dear girl," said Nana tranquilly, disdaining the onlookers.

And with that she picked her up and carried her off, though she was in disgusting contrast to her light blue landau and her dress of pearl-gray silk trimmed with Chantilly, while the street smiled at the coachman's loftily dignified demeanor.

From that day forth Nana had a passion to occupy her thoughts. Satin became her vicious foible. Washed and dressed and duly installed in the house in the Avenue de Villiers, during three days the girl talked of Saint-Lazare and the annoyances the sisters had caused her and how those dirty police people had put her down on the official list. Nana grew indignant and comforted her and vowed she would get her name taken off, even though she herself should have to go and find out the minister of the interior. Meanwhile there was no sort of hurry: nobody would come and search for her at Nana's

—that was certain. And thereupon the two women began to pass tender afternoons together, making numberless endearing little speeches and mingling their kisses with laughter. The same little sport, which the arrival of the plain-clothes men had interrupted in the Rue de Laval, was beginning again in a jocular sort of spirit. One fine evening, however, it became serious, and Nana, who had been so disgusted at Laure's, now understood what it meant. She was upset and enraged by it, the more so because Satin disappeared on the morning of the fourth day. No one had seen her go out. She had, indeed, slipped away in her new dress, seized by a longing for air, full of sentimental regret for her old street existence.

That day there was such a terrible storm in the house that all the servants hung their heads in sheepish silence. Nana had come near beating François for not throwing himself across the door through which Satin escaped. She did her best, however, to control herself, and talked of Satin as a dirty swine. Oh, it would teach her to pick filthy things like that out of the gutter!

When Madame shut herself up in her room in the afternoon Zoé heard her sobbing. In the evening she suddenly asked for her carriage and had herself driven to Laure's. It had occurred to her that she would find Satin at the table d'hôte in the Rue des Martyrs. She was not going there for the sake of seeing her again but in order to catch her one in the face! As a matter of fact, Satin was dining at a little table with Mme Robert. Seeing Nana, she began to laugh, but the former, though wounded to the quick, did not make a scene. On the contrary, she was very sweet and very compliant. She paid for champagne, made five or six tablefuls tipsy and then carried off Satin when Mme Robert was in the closets. Not till they were in the carriage did she make a mordant attack on her, threatening to kill her if she did it again.

After that day the same little business began again continually. On twenty different occasions Nana, tragically furious, as only a jilted woman can be, ran off in pursuit of this sluttish creature, whose flights were prompted by the boredom she suffered amid the comforts of her new home. Nana began to talk of boxing Mme Robert's ears; one day she even meditated a duel; there was one woman too many, she said.

In these latter times, whenever she dined at Laure's, she donned her diamonds and occasionally brought with her Louise Violaine, Maria Blond and Tatan Néné, all of them ablaze with finery; and while the sordid feast was progressing in the three saloons and the yellow gaslight flared overhead, these four resplendent ladies would demean themselves with a vengeance, for it was their delight to dazzle the little local courtesans and to carry them off when dinner was over. On days such as these Laure, sleek and tight-laced as ever, would kiss everyone with an air of expanded maternity. Yet notwithstanding all these circumstances Satin's blue eyes and pure virginal face remained as calm as heretofore; torn, beaten and pestered by the two women, she would simply remark that it was a funny business, and they would have done far better to make it up at once. It did no good to slap her; she couldn't cut herself in two, however much she wanted to be nice to everybody. It was Nana who finally carried her off in triumph, so assiduously had she loaded Satin

with kindnesses and presents. In order to be revenged, however, Mme Robert wrote abominable, anonymous letters to her rival's lovers.

For some time past Count Muffat had appeared suspicious, and one morning, with considerable show of feeling, he laid before Nana an anonymous letter, where in the very first sentences she read that she was accused of deceiving the count with Vandeuves and the young Hugons.

"It's false! It's false!" she loudly exclaimed in accents of extraordinary candor.

"You swear?" asked Muffat, already willing to be comforted.

"I'll swear by whatever you like—yes, by the head of my child!"

But the letter was long. Soon her connection with Satin was described in the broadest and most ignoble terms. When she had done reading she smiled.

"Now I know who it comes from," she remarked simply.

And as Muffat wanted her denial to the charges therein contained, she resumed quietly enough:

"That's a matter which doesn't concern you, dear old pet. How can it hurt you?"

She did not deny anything. He used some horrified expressions. Thereupon she shrugged her shoulders. Where had he been all this time? Why, it was done everywhere! And she mentioned her friends and swore that fashionable ladies went in for it. In fact, to hear her speak, nothing could be commoner or more natural. But a lie was a lie, and so a moment ago he had seen how angry she grew in the matter of Vandeuves and the young Hugons! Oh, if that had been true he would have been justified in throttling her! But what was the good of lying to him about a matter of no consequence? And with that she repeated her previous expression:

"Come now, how can it hurt you?"

Then as the scene still continued, she closed it with a rough speech:

"Besides, dear boy, if the thing doesn't suit you it's very simple: the house door's open! There now, you must take me as you find me!"

He hung his head, for the young woman's vows of fidelity made him happy at bottom. She, however, now knew her power over him and ceased to consider his feelings. And from that time forth Satin was openly installed in the house on the same footing as the gentlemen. Vandeuves had not needed anonymous letters in order to understand how matters stood, and accordingly he joked and tried to pick jealous quarrels with Satin. Philippe and Georges, on their parts, treated her like a jolly good fellow, shaking hands with her and cracking the riskiest jokes imaginable.

Nana had an adventure one evening when this slut of a girl had given her the go-by and she had gone to dine in the Rue des Martyrs without being able to catch her. While she was dining by herself Daguenet had appeared on the scene, for although he had reformed, he still occasionally dropped in under the influence of his old vicious inclinations. He hoped of course that no one would meet him in these black recesses, dedicated to the town's lowest depravity. Accordingly even Nana's presence seemed to embarrass him at the outset. But he was not the man to run away and, coming forward with a

smile, he asked if Madame would be so kind as to allow him to dine at her table. Noticing his jocular tone, Nana assumed her magnificently frigid demeanor and icily replied:

"Sit down where you please, sir. We are in a public place."

Thus begun, the conversation proved amusing. But at dessert Nana, bored and burning for a triumph, put her elbows on the table and began in the old familiar way:

"Well, what about your marriage, my lad? Is it getting on all right?"

"Not much," Daguenet averred.

As a matter of fact, just when he was about to venture on his request at the Muffats', he had met with such a cold reception from the count that he had prudently refrained. The business struck him as a failure. Nana fixed her clear eyes on him; she was sitting, leaning her chin on her hand, and there was an ironical curve about her lips.

"Oh yes! I'm a baggage," she resumed slowly. "Oh yes, the future father-in-law will have to be dragged from between my claws! Dear me, dear me, for a fellow with *nous*, you're jolly stupid! What! D'you mean to say you're going to tell your tales to a man who adores me and tells me everything? Now just listen: you shall marry if I wish it, my little man!"

For a minute or two he had felt the truth of this, and now he began scheming out a method of submission. Nevertheless, he still talked jokingly, not wishing the matter to grow serious, and after he had put on his gloves he demanded the hand of Mlle Estelle de Beuville in the strict regulation manner. Nana ended by laughing, as though she had been tickled. Oh, that Mimi! It was impossible to bear him a grudge! Daguenet's great successes with ladies of her class were due to the sweetness of his voice, a voice of such musical purity and pliancy as to have won him among courtesans the sobriquet of "Velvet-Mouth." Every woman would give way to him when he lulled her with his sonorous caresses. He knew this power and rocked Nana to sleep with endless words, telling her all kinds of idiotic anecdotes. When they left the table d'hôte she was blushing rosy-red; she trembled as she hung on his arm; he had reconquered her. As it was very fine, she sent her carriage away and walked with him as far as his own place, where she went upstairs with him naturally enough. Two hours later, as she was dressing again, she said:

"So you hold to this marriage of yours, Mimi?"

"Egad," he muttered, "it's the best thing I could possibly do after all! You know I'm stony broke."

She summoned him to button her boots, and after a pause:

"Good heavens! I've no objection. I'll shove you on! She's as dry as a lath, is that little thing, but since it suits your game—oh, I'm agreeable: I'll run the thing through for you."

Then with bosom still uncovered, she began laughing:

"Only what will you give me?"

He had caught her in his arms and was kissing her on the shoulders in a perfect access of gratitude while she quivered with excitement and struggled merrily and threw herself backward in her efforts to be free.

"Oh, I know," she cried, excited by the contest. "Listen to what I want in the way of commission. On your wedding day you shall make me a present of your innocence. Before your wife, d'you understand?"

"That's it! That's it!" he said, laughing even louder than Nana.

The bargain amused them—they thought the whole business very good, indeed.

Now as it happened, there was a dinner at Nana's next day. For the matter of that, it was the customary Thursday dinner, and Muffat, Vandeuves, the young Hugons and Satin were present. The count arrived early. He stood in need of eighty thousand francs wherewith to free the young woman from two or three debts and to give her a set of sapphires she was dying to possess. As he had already seriously lessened his capital, he was in search of a lender, for he did not dare to sell another property. With the advice of Nana herself he had addressed himself to Labordette, but the latter, deeming it too heavy an undertaking, had mentioned it to the hairdresser Francis, who willingly busied himself in such affairs in order to oblige his lady clients. The count put himself into the hands of these gentlemen but expressed a formal desire not to appear in the matter, and they both undertook to keep in hand the bill for a hundred thousand francs which he was to sign, excusing themselves at the same time for charging a matter of twenty thousand francs interest and loudly denouncing the blackguard usurers to whom, they declared, it had been necessary to have recourse. When Muffat had himself announced, Francis was putting the last touches to Nana's coiffure. Labordette also was sitting familiarly in the dressing room, as became a friend of no consequence. Seeing the count, he discreetly placed a thick bundle of bank notes among the powders and pomades, and the bill was signed on the marble-topped dressing table. Nana was anxious to keep Labordette to dinner, but he declined—he was taking a rich foreigner about Paris. Muffat, however, led him aside and begged him to go to Becker, the jeweler, and bring him back thence the set of sapphires, which he wanted to present the young woman by way of surprise that very evening. Labordette willingly undertook the commission, and half an hour later Julien handed the jewel case mysteriously to the count.

During dinnertime Nana was nervous. The sight of the eighty thousand francs had excited her. To think all that money was to go to tradespeople! It was a disgusting thought. After soup had been served she grew sentimental, and in the splendid dining room, glittering with plate and glass, she talked of the bliss of poverty. The men were in evening dress, Nana in a gown of white embroidered satin, while Satin made a more modest appearance in black silk with a simple gold heart at her throat, which was a present from her kind friend. Julien and François waited behind the guests and were assisted in this by Zoé. All three looked most dignified.

"It's certain I had far greater fun when I hadn't a cent!" Nana repeated.

She had placed Muffat on her right hand and Vandeuves on her left, but she scarcely looked at them, so taken up was she with Satin, who sat in state between Philippe and Georges on the opposite side of the table.

"Eh, duckie?" she kept saying at every turn. "How we did use to laugh in those days when we went to Mother Josse's school in the Rue Polonceau!"

When the roast was being served the two women plunged into a world of reminiscences. They used to have regular chattering fits of this kind when a sudden desire to stir the muddy depths of their childhood would possess them. These fits always occurred when men were present: it was as though they had given way to a burning desire to treat them to the dunghill on which they had grown to woman's estate. The gentlemen paled visibly and looked embarrassed. The young Hugons did their best to laugh, while Vandevres nervously toyed with his beard and Muffat redoubled his gravity.

"You remember Victor?" said Nana. "There was a wicked little fellow for you! Why, he used to take the little girls into cellars!"

"I remember him perfectly," replied Satin. "I recollect the big courtyard at your place very well. There was a portress there with a broom!"

"Mother Boche—she's dead."

"And I can still picture your shop. Your mother was a great fatty. One evening when we were playing your father came in drunk. Oh, so drunk!"

At this point Vandevres tried to intercept the ladies' reminiscences and to effect a diversion.

"I say, my dear, I should be very glad to have some more truffles. They're simply perfect. Yesterday I had some at the house of the Duc de Corbreuse, which did not come up to them at all."

"The truffles, Julien!" said Nana roughly.

Then returning to the subject:

"By Jove, yes, Dad hadn't any sense! And then what a smash there was! You should have seen it—down, down, down we went, starving away all the time. I can tell you I've had to bear pretty well everything, and it's a miracle I didn't kick the bucket over it, like Daddy and Mamma."

This time Muffat, who was playing with his knife in a state of infinite exasperation, made so bold as to intervene.

"What you're telling us isn't very cheerful."

"Eh, what? Not cheerful!" she cried with a withering glance. "I believe you; it isn't cheerful! Somebody had to earn a living for us, dear boy. Oh yes, you know, I'm the right sort; I don't mince matters. Mamma was a laundress; Daddy used to get drunk, and he died of it! There! If it doesn't suit you—if you're ashamed of my family—"

They all protested. What was she after now? They had every sort of respect for her family! But she went on:

"If you're ashamed of my family you'll please leave me, because I'm not one of those women who deny their father and mother. You must take me and them together, d'you understand?"

They took her as required; they accepted the dad, the mamma, the past; in fact, whatever she chose. With their eyes fixed on the tablecloth, the four now sat shrinking and insignificant while Nana, in a transport of omnipotence, trampled on them in the old muddy boots worn long since in the Rue de la Goutte-d'Or. She was determined not to lay down the cudgels just yet. It

was all very fine to bring her fortunes, to build her palaces; she would never leave off regretting the time when she munched apples! Oh, what bosh that stupid thing money was! It was made for the tradespeople! Finally her outburst ended in a sentimentally expressed desire for a simple, openhearted existence, to be passed in an atmosphere of universal benevolence.

When she got to this point she noticed Julien waiting idly by.

"Well, what's the matter? Hand the champagne then!" she said. "Why d'you stand staring at me like a goose?"

During this scene the servants had never once smiled. They apparently heard nothing, and the more their mistress let herself down, the more majestic they became. Julien set to work to pour out the champagne and did so without mishap, but François, who was handing round the fruit, was so unfortunate as to tilt the fruit dish too low, and the apples, the pears and the grapes rolled on the table.

"You bloody clumsy lot!" cried Nana.

The footman was mistaken enough to try and explain that the fruit had not been firmly piled up. Zoé had disarranged it by taking out some oranges.

"Then it's Zoé that's the goose!" said Nana.

"Madame——" murmured the lady's maid in an injured tone.

Straightway Madame rose to her feet, and in a sharp voice and with royally authoritative gesture:

"We've had enough of this, haven't we? Leave the room, all of you! We don't want you any longer!"

This summary procedure calmed her down, and she was forthwith all sweetness and amiability. The dessert proved charming, and the gentlemen grew quite merry waiting on themselves. But Satin, having peeled a pear, came and ate it behind her darling, leaning on her shoulder the while and whispering sundry little remarks in her ear, at which they both laughed very loudly. By and by she wanted to share her last piece of pear with Nana and presented it to her between her teeth. Whereupon there was a great nibbling of lips, and the pear was finished amid kisses. At this there was a burst of comic protest from the gentlemen, Philippe shouting to them to take it easy and Vandeuves asking if one ought to leave the room. Georges, meanwhile, had come and put his arm round Satin's waist and had brought her back to her seat.

"How silly of you!" said Nana. "You're making her blush, the poor, darling duck. Never mind, dear girl, let them chaff. It's our own little private affair." And turning to Muffat, who was watching them with his serious expression:

"Isn't it, my friend?"

"Yes, certainly," he murmured with a slow nod of approval.

He no longer protested now. And so amid that company of gentlemen with the great names and the old, upright traditions, the two women sat face to face, exchanging tender glances, conquering, reigning, in tranquil defiance of the laws of sex, in open contempt for the male portion of the community. The gentlemen burst into applause.

The company went upstairs to take coffee in the little drawing room, where

a couple of lamps cast a soft glow over the rosy hangings and the lacquer and old gold of the knickknacks. At that hour of the evening the light played discreetly over coffers, bronzes and china, lighting up silver or ivory inlaid work, bringing into view the polished contours of a carved stick and gleaming over a panel with glossy silky reflections. The fire, which had been burning since the afternoon, was dying out in glowing embers. It was very warm—the air behind the curtains and hangings was languid with warmth. The room was full of Nana's intimate existence: a pair of gloves, a fallen handkerchief, an open book, lay scattered about, and their owner seemed present in careless attire with that well-known odor of violets and that species of untidiness which became her in her character of good-natured courtesan and had such a charming effect among all those rich surroundings. The very armchairs, which were as wide as beds, and the sofas, which were as deep as alcoves, invited to slumber oblivious of the flight of time and to tender whispers in shadowy corners.

Satin went and lolled back in the depths of a sofa near the fireplace. She had lit a cigarette, but Vandeuvres began amusing himself by pretending to be ferociously jealous. Nay, he even threatened to send her his seconds if she still persisted in keeping Nana from her duty. Philippe and Georges joined him and teased her and badgered her so mercilessly that at last she shouted out:

"Darling! Darling! Do make 'em keep quiet! They're still after me!"

"Now then, let her be," said Nana seriously. "I won't have her tormented; you know that quite well. And you, my pet, why d'you always go mixing yourself up with them when they've got so little sense?"

Satin, blushing all over and putting out her tongue, went into the dressing room, through the widely open door of which you caught a glimpse of pale marbles gleaming in the milky light of a gas flame in a globe of rough glass. After that Nana talked to the four men as charmingly as hostess could. During the day she had read a novel which was at that time making a good deal of noise. It was the history of a courtesan, and Nana was very indignant, declaring the whole thing to be untrue and expressing angry dislike to that kind of monstrous literature which pretends to paint from nature. "Just as though one could describe everything," she said. Just as though a novel ought not to be written so that the reader may while away an hour pleasantly! In the matter of books and of plays Nana had very decided opinions: she wanted tender and noble productions, things that would set her dreaming and would elevate her soul. Then allusion being made in the course of conversation to the troubles agitating Paris, the incendiary articles in the papers, the incipient popular disturbances which followed the calls to arms nightly raised at public meetings, she waxed wroth with the Republicans. What on earth did those dirty people who never washed really want? Were folks not happy? Had not the emperor done everything for the people? A nice filthy lot of people! She knew 'em; she could talk about 'em, and, quite forgetting the respect which at dinner she had just been insisting should be paid to her humble circle in the Rue de la Goutte-d'Or, she began blackguarding her own class with all the terror and disgust peculiar to a woman who had risen successfully above

it. That very afternoon she had read in the *Figaro* an account of the proceedings at a public meeting which had verged on the comic. Owing to the slang words that had been used and to the piggish behavior of a drunken man who had got himself chucked, she was laughing at those proceedings still.

"Oh, those drunkards!" she said with a disgusted air. "No, look you here, their republic would be a great misfortune for everybody! Oh, may God preserve us the emperor as long as possible!"

"God will hear your prayer, my dear," Muffat replied gravely. "To be sure, the emperor stands firm."

He liked her to express such excellent views. Both, indeed, understood one another in political matters. Vandeuves and Philippe Hugon likewise indulged in endless jokes against the "cads," the quarrelsome set who scuttled off the moment they clapped eyes on a bayonet. But Georges that evening remained pale and somber.

"What can be the matter with that baby?" asked Nana, noticing his troubled appearance.

"With me? Nothing—I am listening," he muttered.

But he was really suffering. On rising from table he had heard Philippe joking with the young woman, and now it was Philippe, and not himself, who sat beside her. His heart, he knew not why, swelled to bursting. He could not bear to see them so close together; such vile thoughts oppressed him that shame mingled with his anguish. He who laughed at Satin, who had accepted Steiner and Muffat and all the rest, felt outraged and murderous at the thought that Philippe might someday touch that woman.

"Here, take Bijou," she said to comfort him, and she passed him the little dog which had gone to sleep on her dress.

And with that Georges grew happy again, for with the beast still warm from her lap in his arms, he held, as it were, part of her.

Allusion had been made to a considerable loss which Vandeuves had last night sustained at the Imperial Club. Muffat, who did not play, expressed great astonishment, but Vandeuves smilingly alluded to his imminent ruin, about which Paris was already talking. The kind of death you chose did not much matter, he averred; the great thing was to die handsomely. For some time past Nana had noticed that he was nervous and had a sharp downward droop of the mouth and a fitful gleam in the depths of his clear eyes. But he retained his haughty aristocratic manner and the delicate elegance of his impoverished race, and as yet these strange manifestations were only, so to speak, momentary fits of vertigo overcoming a brain already sapped by play and by debauchery. One night as he lay beside her he had frightened her with a dreadful story. He had told her he contemplated shutting himself up in his stable and setting fire to himself and his horses at such time as he should have devoured all his substance. His only hope at that period was a horse, Lusignan by name, which he was training for the Prix de Paris. He was living on this horse, which was the sole stay of his shaken credit, and whenever Nana grew exacting he would put her off till June and to the probability of Lusignan's winning.

"Bah! He may very likely lose," she said merrily, "since he's going to clear them all out at the races."

By way of reply he contented himself by smiling a thin, mysterious smile. Then carelessly:

"By the by, I've taken the liberty of giving your name to my outsider, the filly. Nana, Nana—that sounds well. You're not vexed?"

"Vexed, why?" she said in a state of inward ecstasy.

The conversation continued, and same mention was made of an execution shortly to take place. The young woman said she was burning to go to it when Satin appeared at the dressing-room door and called her in tones of entreaty. She got up at once and left the gentlemen lolling lazily about, while they finished their cigars and discussed the grave question as to how far a murderer subject to chronic alcoholism is responsible for his act. In the dressing room Zoé sat helpless on a chair, crying her heart out, while Satin vainly endeavored to console her.

"What's the matter?" said Nana in surprise.

"Oh, darling, do speak to her!" said Satin. "I've been trying to make her listen to reason for the last twenty minutes. She's crying because you called her a goose."

"Yes, madame, it's very hard—very hard," stuttered Zoe, choked by a fresh fit of sobbing.

This sad sight melted the young woman's heart at once. She spoke kindly, and when the other woman still refused to grow calm she sank down in front of her and took her round the waist with truly cordial familiarity:

"But, you silly, I said 'goose' just as I might have said anything else. How shall I explain? I was in a passion—it was wrong of me; now calm down."

"I who love Madame so," stuttered Zoé; "after all I've done for Madame."

Thereupon Nana kissed the lady's maid and, wishing to show her she wasn't vexed, gave her a dress she had worn three times. Their quarrels always ended up in the giving of presents! Zoé plugged her handkerchief into her eyes. She carried the dress off over her arm and added before leaving that they were very sad in the kitchen and that Julien and François had been unable to eat, so entirely had Madame's anger taken away their appetites. Thereupon Madame sent them a louis as a pledge of reconciliation. She suffered too much if people around her were sorrowful.

Nana was returning to the drawing room, happy in the thought that she had patched up a disagreement which was rendering her quietly apprehensive of the morrow, when Satin came and whispered vehemently in her ear. She was full of complaint, threatened to be off if those men still went on teasing her and kept insisting that her darling should turn them all out of doors for that night, at any rate. It would be a lesson to them. And then it would be so nice to be alone, both of them! Nana, with a return of anxiety, declared it to be impossible. Thereupon the other shouted at her like a violent child and tried hard to overrule her.

"I wish it, d'you see? Send 'em away or I'm off!"

And she went back into the drawing room, stretched herself out in the re-

cesses of a divan, which stood in the background near the window, and lay waiting, silent and deathlike, with her great eyes fixed upon Nana.

The gentlemen were deciding against the new criminological theories. Granted that lovely invention of irresponsibility in certain pathological cases, and criminals ceased to exist and sick people alone remained. The young woman, expressing approval with an occasional nod, was busy considering how best to dismiss the count. The others would soon be going, but he would assuredly prove obstinate. In fact, when Philippe got up to withdraw, Georges followed him at once—he seemed only anxious not to leave his brother behind. Vandeuvres lingered some minutes longer, feeling his way, as it were, and waiting to find out if, by any chance, some important business would oblige Muffat to cede him his place. Soon, however, when he saw the count deliberately taking up his quarters for the night, he desisted from his purpose and said good-by, as became a man of tact. But on his way to the door, he noticed Satin staring fixedly at Nana, as usual. Doubtless he understood what this meant, for he seemed amused and came and shook hands with her.

"We're not angry, eh?" he whispered. "Pray pardon me. You're the nicer attraction of the two, on my honor!"

Satin deigned no reply. Nor did she take her eyes off Nana and the count, who were now alone. Muffat, ceasing to be ceremonious, had come to sit beside the young woman. He took her fingers and began kissing them. Whereupon Nana, seeking to change the current of his thoughts, asked him if his daughter Estelle were better. The previous night he had been complaining of the child's melancholy behavior—he could not even spend a day happily at his own house, with his wife always out and his daughter icily silent.

In family matters of this kind Nana was always full of good advice, and when Muffat abandoned all his usual self-control under the influence of mental and physical relaxation and once more launched out into his former complaints, she remembered the promise she had made.

"Suppose you were to marry her?" she said. And with that she ventured to talk of Daguenet. At the mere mention of the name the count was filled with disgust. "Never," he said after what she had told him!

She pretended great surprise and then burst out laughing and put her arm round his neck.

"Oh, the jealous man! To think of it! Just argue it out a little. Why, they slandered me to you—I was furious. At present I should be ever so sorry if——"

But over Muffat's shoulder she met Satin's gaze. And she left him anxiously and in a grave voice continued:

"This marriage must come off, my friend; I don't want to prevent your daughter's happiness. The young man's most charming; you could not possibly find a better sort."

And she launched into extraordinary praise of Daguenet. The count had again taken her hands; he no longer refused now; he would see about it, he said, they would talk the matter over. By and by, when he spoke of going to bed, she sank her voice and excused herself. It was impossible; she was not well. If he loved her at all he would not insist! Nevertheless, he was obstinate;

he refused to go away, and she was beginning to give in when she met Satin's eyes once more. Then she grew inflexible. No, the thing was out of the question! The count, deeply moved and with a look of suffering, had risen and was going in quest of his hat. But in the doorway he remembered the set of sapphires; he could feel the case in his pocket. He had been wanting to hide it at the bottom of the bed so that when she entered it before him she should feel it against her legs. Since dinnertime he had been meditating this little surprise like a schoolboy, and now, in trouble and anguish of heart at being thus dismissed, he gave her the case without further ceremony.

"What is it?" she queried. "Sapphires? Dear me! Oh yes, it's that set. How sweet you are! But I say, my darling, d'you believe it's the same one? In the shopwindow it made a much greater show."

That was all the thanks he got, and she let him go away. He noticed Satin stretched out silent and expectant, and with that he gazed at both women and without further insistence submitted to his fate and went downstairs. The hall door had not yet closed when Satin caught Nana round the waist and danced and sang. Then she ran to the window.

"Oh, just look at the figure he cuts down in the street!" The two women leaned upon the wrought-iron window rail in the shadow of the curtains. One o'clock struck. The Avenue de Villiers was deserted, and its double file of gas lamps stretched away into the darkness of the damp March night through which great gusts of wind kept sweeping, laden with rain. There were vague stretches of land on either side of the road which looked like gulfs of shadow, while scaffoldings round mansions in process of construction loomed upward under the dark sky. They laughed uncontrollably as they watched Muffat's rounded back and glistening shadow disappearing along the wet sidewalk into the glacial, desolate plains of new Paris. But Nana silenced Satin.

"Take care; there are the police!"

Thereupon they smothered their laughter and gazed in secret fear at two dark figures walking with measured tread on the opposite side of the avenue. Amid all her luxurious surroundings, amid all the royal splendors of the woman whom all must obey, Nana still stood in horror of the police and did not like to hear them mentioned any oftener than death. She felt distinctly unwell when a policeman looked up at her house. One never knew what such people might do! They might easily take them for loose women if they heard them laughing at that hour of the night. Satin, with a little shudder, had squeezed herself up against Nana. Nevertheless, the pair stayed where they were and were soon interested in the approach of a lantern, the light of which danced over the puddles in the road. It was an old ragpicker woman who was busy raking in the gutters. Satin recognized her.

"Dear me," she exclaimed, "it's Queen Pomaré with her wickerwork shawl!"

And while a gust of wind lashed the fine rain in their faces she told her beloved the story of Queen Pomaré. Oh, she had been a splendid girl once upon a time: all Paris had talked of her beauty. And such devilish go and such cheek! Why, she led the men about like dogs, and great people stood blubbing on her stairs! Now she was in the habit of getting tipsy, and the women

round about would make her drink absinthe for the sake of a laugh, after which the street boys would throw stones at her and chase her. In fact, it was a regular smashup; the queen had tumbled into the mud! Nana listened, feeling cold all over.

"You shall see," added Satin.

She whistled a man's whistle, and the ragpicker, who was then below the window, lifted her head and showed herself by the yellow flare of her lantern. Framed among rags, a perfect bundle of them, a face looked out from under a tattered kerchief—a blue, seamed face with a toothless, cavernous mouth and fiery bruises where the eyes should be. And Nana, seeing the frightful old woman, the wanton drowned in drink, had a sudden fit of recollection and saw far back amid the shadows of consciousness the vision of Chamont—Irma d'Anglars, the old harlot crowned with years and honors, ascending the steps in front of her château amid abjectly reverential villagers. Then as Satin whistled again, making game of the old hag, who could not see her:

"Do leave off; there are the police!" she murmured in changed tones. "In with us, quick, my pet!"

The measured steps were returning, and they shut the window. Turning round again, shivering, and with the damp of night on her hair, Nana was momentarily astounded at sight of her drawing room. It seemed as though she had forgotten it and were entering an unknown chamber. So warm, so full of perfume, was the air she encountered that she experienced a sense of delighted surprise. The heaped-up wealth of the place, the Old World furniture, the fabrics of silk and gold, the ivory, the bronzes, were slumbering in the rosy light of the lamps, while from the whole of the silent house a rich feeling of great luxury ascended, the luxury of the solemn reception rooms, of the comfortable, ample dining room, of the vast retired staircase, with their soft carpets and seats. Her individuality, with its longing for domination and enjoyment and its desire to possess everything that she might destroy everything, was suddenly increased. Never before had she felt so profoundly the puissance of her sex. She gazed slowly round and remarked with an expression of grave philosophy:

"Ah well, all the same, one's jolly well right to profit by things when one's young!"

But now Satin was rolling on the bearskins in the bedroom and calling her.

"Oh, do come! Do come!"

Nana undressed in the dressing room, and in order to be quicker about it she took her thick fell of blonde hair in both hands and began shaking it above the silver wash hand basin, while a downward hail of long hairpins rang a little chime on the shining metal.

CHAPTER XI

ONE SUNDAY the race for the Grand Prix de Paris was being run in the Bois de Boulogne beneath skies rendered sultry by the first heats of June. The sun that

morning had risen amid a mist of dun-colored dust, but toward eleven o'clock, just when the carriages were reaching the Longchamps course, a southerly wind had swept away the clouds; long streamers of gray vapor were disappearing across the sky, and gaps showing an intense blue beyond were spreading from one end of the horizon to the other. In the bright bursts of sunlight which alternated with the clouds the whole scene shone again, from the field which was gradually filling with a crowd of carriages, horsemen and pedestrians, to the still-vacant course, where the judge's box stood, together with the posts and the masts for signaling numbers, and thence on to the five symmetrical stands of brickwork and timber, rising gallery upon gallery in the middle of the weighing enclosure opposite. Beyond these, bathed in the light of noon, lay the vast level plain, bordered with little trees and shut in to the westward by the wooded heights of Saint-Cloud and the Suresnes, which, in their turn, were dominated by the severe outlines of Mont-Valérien.

Nana, as excited as if the Grand Prix were going to make her fortune, wanted to take up a position by the railing next the winning post. She had arrived very early—she was, in fact, one of the first to come—in a landau adorned with silver and drawn, à la Daumont, by four splendid white horses. This landau was a present from Count Muffat. When she had made her appearance at the entrance to the field with two postilions jogging blithely on the near horses and two footmen perching motionless behind the carriage, the people had rushed to look as though a queen were passing. She sported the blue and white colors of the Vandevres stable, and her dress was remarkable. It consisted of a little blue silk bodice and tunic, which fitted closely to the body and bulged out enormously behind her waist, thereby bringing her lower limbs into bold relief in such a manner as to be extremely noticeable in that epoch of voluminous skirts. Then there was a white satin dress with white satin sleeves and a sash worn crosswise over the shoulders, the whole ornamented with silver guipure which shone in the sun. In addition to this, in order to be still more like a jockey, she had stuck a blue toque with a white feather jauntily upon her chignon, the fair tresses from which flowed down beyond her shoulders and resembled an enormous russet pigtail.

Twelve struck. The public would have to wait more than three hours for the Grand Prix to be run. When the landau had drawn up beside the barriers Nana settled herself comfortably down as though she were in her own house. A whim had prompted her to bring Bijou and Louiset with her, and the dog crouched among her skirts, shivering with cold despite the heat of the day, while amid a bedizenment of ribbons and laces the child's poor little face looked waxen and dumb and white in the open air. Meanwhile the young woman, without troubling about the people near her, talked at the top of her voice with Georges and Philippe Hugon, who were seated opposite on the front seat among such a mountain of bouquets of white roses and blue myosotis that they were buried up to their shoulders.

"Well then," she was saying, "as he bored me to death, I showed him the door. And now it's two days that he's been sulking."

She was talking of Muffat, but she took care not to confess to the young

men the real reason for this first quarrel, which was that one evening he had found a man's hat in her bedroom. She had indeed brought home a passer-by out of sheer ennui—a silly infatuation.

"You have no idea how funny he is," she continued, growing merry over the particulars she was giving. "He's a regular bigot at bottom, so he says his prayers every evening. Yes, he does. He's under the impression I notice nothing because I go to bed first so as not to be in his way, but I watch him out of the corner of my eye. Oh, he jaws away, and then he crosses himself when he turns round to step over me and get to the inside of the bed."

"Jove, it's sly," muttered Philippe. "That's what happens before, but afterward, what then?"

She laughed merrily.

"Yes, just so, before and after! When I'm going to sleep I hear him jawing away again. But the biggest bore of all is that we can't argue about anything now without his growing 'pi.' I've always been religious. Yes, chaff as much as you like; that won't prevent me believing what I do believe! Only he's too much of a nuisance: he blubbers; he talks about remorse. The day before yesterday, for instance, he had a regular fit of it after our usual row, and I wasn't the least bit reassured when all was over."

But she broke off, crying out:

"Just look at the Mignons arriving. Dear me, they've brought the children! Oh, how those little chaps are dressed up!"

The Mignons were in a landau of severe hue; there was something substantially luxurious about their turnout, suggesting rich retired tradespeople. Rose was in a gray silk gown trimmed with red knots and with puffs; she was smiling happily at the joyous behavior of Henri and Charles, who sat on the front seat, looking awkward in their ill-fitting collegians' tunics. But when the landau had drawn up by the rails and she perceived Nana sitting in triumph among her bouquets, with her four horses and her liveries, she pursed up her lips, sat bolt upright and turned her head away. Mignon, on the other hand, looking the picture of freshness and gaiety, waved her a salutation. He made it a matter of principle to keep out of feminine disagreements.

"By the by," Nana resumed, "d'you know a little old man who's very clean and neat and has bad teeth—a Monsieur Venot? He came to see me this morning."

"Monsieur Venot?" said Georges in great astonishment. "It's impossible! Why, the man's a Jesuit!"

"Precisely; I spotted that. Oh, you have no idea what our conversation was like! It was just funny! He spoke to me about the count, about his divided house, and begged me to restore a family its happiness. He was very polite and very smiling for the matter of that. Then I answered to the effect that I wanted nothing better, and I undertook to reconcile the count and his wife. You know it's not humbug. I should be delighted to see them all happy again, the poor things! Besides, it would be a relief to me, for there are days—yes, there are days—when he bores me to death."

The weariness of the last months escaped her in this heartfelt outburst.

Moreover, the count appeared to be in big money difficulties; he was anxious, and it seemed likely that the bill which Labordette had put his name to would not be met.

"Dear me, the countess is down yonder," said Georges, letting his gaze wander over the stands.

"Where, where?" cried Nana. "What eyes that baby's got! Hold my sunshade, Philippe."

But with a quick forward dart Georges had outstripped his brother. It enchanted him to be holding the blue silk sunshade with its silver fringe. Nana was scanning the scene through a huge pair of field glasses.

"Ah yes! I see her," she said at length. "In the right-hand stand, near a pillar, eh? She's in mauve, and her daughter in white by her side. Dear me, there's Daguenet going to bow to them."

Thereupon Philippe talked of Daguenet's approaching marriage with that lath of an Estelle. It was a settled matter—the banns were being published. At first the countess had opposed it, but the count, they said, had insisted. Nana smiled.

"I know, I know," she murmured. "So much the better for Paul. He's a nice boy—he deserves it."

And leaning toward Louiset:

"You're enjoying yourself, eh? What a grave face!"

The child never smiled. With a very old expression he was gazing at all those crowds, as though the sight of them filled him with melancholy reflections. Bijou, chased from the skirts of the young woman who was moving about a great deal, had come to nestle, shivering, against the little fellow.

Meanwhile the field was filling up. Carriages, a compact, interminable file of them, were continually arriving through the *Porte de la Cascade*. There were big omnibuses such as the *Pauline*, which had started from the *Boulevard des Italiens*, freighted with its fifty passengers, and was now going to draw up to the right of the stands. Then there were dogcarts, victorias, landaus, all superbly well turned out, mingled with lamentable cabs which jolted along behind sorry old hacks, and four-in-hands, sending along their four horses, and mail coaches, where the masters sat on the seats above and left the servants to take care of the hampers of champagne inside, and "spiders," the immense wheels of which were a flash of glittering steel, and light tandems, which looked as delicately formed as the works of a clock and slipped along amid a peal of little bells. Every few seconds an equestrian rode by, and a swarm of people on foot rushed in a scared way among the carriages. On the green the far-off rolling sound which issued from the avenues in the Bois died out suddenly in dull rustlings, and now nothing was audible save the hubbub of the ever-increasing crowds and cries and calls and the crackings of whips in the open. When the sun, amid bursts of wind, reappeared at the edge of a cloud, a long ray of golden light ran across the field, lit up the harness and the varnished coach panels and touched the ladies' dresses with fire, while amid the dusty radiance the coachmen, high up on their boxes, flamed beside their great whips.

Labordette was getting out of an open carriage where Gaga, Clarisse and Blanche de Sivry had kept a place for him. As he was hurrying to cross the course and enter the weighing enclosure Nana got Georges to call him. Then when he came up:

"What's the betting on me?" she asked laughingly.

She referred to the filly Nana, the Nana who had let herself be shamefully beaten in the race for the Prix de Diane and had not even been placed in April and May last when she ran for the Prix des Cars and the Grande Poule des Produits, both of which had been gained by Lusignan, the other horse in the Vandeuvres stable. Lusignan had all at once become prime favorite, and since yesterday he had been currently taken at two to one.

"Always fifty to one against," replied Labordette.

"The deuce! I'm not worth much," rejoined Nana, amused by the jest. "I don't back myself then; no, by jingo! I don't put a single louis on myself."

Labordette went off again in a great hurry, but she recalled him. She wanted some advice. Since he kept in touch with the world of trainers and jockeys he had special information about various stables. His prognostications had come true a score of times already, and people called him the "King of Tipsters."

"Let's see, what horses ought I to choose?" said the young woman. "What's the betting on the Englishman?"

"Spirit? Three to one against. Valerio II, the same. As to the others, they're laying twenty-five to one against Cosinus, forty to one against Hazard, thirty to one against Boum, thirty-five to one against Pichenette, ten to one against Frangipane."

"No, I don't bet on the Englishman, I don't. I'm a patriot. Perhaps Valerio II would do, eh? The Duc de Corbreuse was beaming a little while ago. Well, no, after all! Fifty louis on Lusignan; what do you say to that?"

Labordette looked at her with a singular expression. She leaned forward and asked him questions in a low voice, for she was aware that Vandeuvres commissioned him to arrange matters with the bookmakers so as to be able to bet the more easily. Supposing him to have got to know something, he might quite well tell it her. But without entering into explanations Labordette persuaded her to trust to his sagacity. He would put on her fifty louis for her as he might think best, and she would not repent of his arrangement.

"All the horses you like!" she cried gaily, letting him take his departure, "but no Nana; she's a jade!"

There was a burst of uproarious laughter in the carriage. The young men thought her sally very amusing, while Louiset in his ignorance lifted his pale eyes to his mother's face, for her loud exclamations surprised him. However, there was no escape for Labordette as yet. Rose Mignon had made a sign to him and was now giving him her commands while he wrote figures in a notebook. Then Clarisse and Gaga called him back in order to change their bets, for they had heard things said in the crowd, and now they didn't want to have anything more to do with Valerio II and were choosing Lusignan. He

wrote down their wishes with an impassible expression and at length managed to escape. He could be seen disappearing between two of the stands on the other side of the course.

Carriages were still arriving. They were by this time drawn up five rows deep, and a dense mass of them spread along the barriers, checkered by the light coats of white horses. Beyond them other carriages stood about in comparative isolation, looking as though they had stuck fast in the grass. Wheels and harness were here, there and everywhere, according as the conveyances to which they belonged were side by side, at an angle, across and across or head to head. Over such spaces of turf as still remained unoccupied cavaliers kept trotting, and black groups of pedestrians moved continually. The scene resembled the field where a fair is being held, and above it all, amid the confused motley of the crowd, the drinking booths raised their gray canvas roofs, which gleamed white in the sunshine. But a veritable tumult, a mob, an eddy of hats, surged round the several bookmakers, who stood in open carriages, gesticulating like itinerant dentists while their odds were pasted up on tall boards beside them.

"All the same, it's stupid not to know on what horse one's betting," Nana was remarking. "I really must risk some louis in person."

She had stood up to select a bookmaker with a decent expression of face but forgot what she wanted on perceiving a perfect crowd of her acquaintance. Besides the Mignons, besides Gaga, Clarisse and Blanche, there were present, to the right and left, behind and in the middle of the mass of carriages now hemming in her landau, the following ladies: Tatan Néné and Maria Blond in a victoria, Caroline Héquet with her mother and two gentlemen in an open carriage, Louise Violaine quite alone, driving a little basket chaise, decked with orange and green ribbons, the colors of the Méchain stables, and finally, Léa de Horn on the lofty seat of a mail coach, where a band of young men were making a great din. Farther off, in a *huit ressorts* of aristocratic appearance, Lucy Stewart, in a very simple black silk dress, sat, looking distinguished beside a tall young man in the uniform of a naval cadet. But what most astounded Nana was the arrival of Simonne in a tandem which Steiner was driving, while a footman sat motionless, with folded arms, behind them. She looked dazzling in white satin striped with yellow and was covered with diamonds from waist to hat. The banker, on his part, was handling a tremendous whip and sending along his two horses, which were harnessed tandemwise, the leader being a little warm-colored chestnut with a mouselike trot, the shaft horse a big brown bay, a stepper, with a fine action.

"Deuce take it!" said Nana. "So that thief Steiner has cleared the Bourse again, has he? I say, isn't Simonne a swell! It's too much of a good thing; he'll get into the clutches of the law!"

Nevertheless, she exchanged greetings at a distance. Indeed, she kept waving her hand and smiling, turning round and forgetting no one in her desire to be seen by everybody. At the same time she continued chatting.

"It's her son Lucy's got in tow! He's charming in his uniform. That's why

she's looking so grand, of course! You know she's afraid of him and that she passes herself off as an actress. Poor young man, I pity him all the same! He seems quite unsuspecting."

"Bah," muttered Philippe, laughing, "she'll be able to find him an heiress in the country when she likes."

Nana was silent, for she had just noticed the Tricon amid the thick of the carriages. Having arrived in a cab, whence she could not see anything, the Tricon had quietly mounted the coach box. And there, straightening up her tall figure, with her noble face enshrined in its long curls, she dominated the crowd as though enthroned amid her feminine subjects. All the latter smiled discreetly at her while she, in her superiority, pretended not to know them. She wasn't there for business purposes: she was watching the races for the love of the thing, as became a frantic gambler with a passion for horseflesh.

"Dear me, there's that idiot La Faloise!" said Georges suddenly.

It was a surprise to them all. Nana did not recognize her La Faloise, for since he had come into his inheritance he had grown extraordinarily up to date. He wore a low collar and was clad in a cloth of delicate hue which fitted close to his meager shoulders. His hair was in little bandeaux, and he affected a weary kind of swagger, a soft tone of voice and slang words and phrases which he did not take the trouble to finish.

"But he's quite the thing!" declared Nana in perfect enchantment.

Gaga and Clarisse had called La Faloise and were throwing themselves at him in their efforts to regain his allegiance, but he left them immediately, rolling off in a chaffing, disdainful manner. Nana dazzled him. He rushed up to her and stood on the carriage step, and when she twitted him about Gaga he murmured:

"Oh dear, no! We've seen the last of the old lot! Mustn't play her off on me any more. And then, you know, it's you now, Juliet mine!"

He had put his hand to his heart. Nana laughed a good deal at this exceedingly sudden out-of-door declaration. She continued:

"I say, that's not what I'm after. You're making me forget that I want to lay wagers. Georges, you see that bookmaker down there, a great red-faced man with curly hair? He's got a dirty blackguard expression which I like. You're to go and choose— Oh, I say, what can one choose?"

"I'm not a patriotic soul—oh dear, no!" La Faloise blurted out. "I'm all for the Englishman. It will be ripping if the Englishman gains! The French may go to Jericho!"

Nana was scandalized. Presently the merits of the several horses began to be discussed, and La Faloise, wishing to be thought very much in the swim, spoke of them all as sorry jades. Frangipane, Baron Verdier's horse, was by The Truth out of Lenore. A big bay horse he was, who would certainly have stood a chance if they hadn't let him get foundered during training. As to Valerio II from the Corbreuse stable, he wasn't ready yet; he'd had the colic in April. Oh yes, they were keeping that dark, but he was sure of it, on his honor! In the end he advised Nana to choose Hazard, the most defective of the lot, a horse nobody would have anything to do with. Hazard, by jingo—

such superb lines and such an action! That horse was going to astonish the people.

"No," said Nana, "I'm going to put ten louis on Lusignan and five on Boum."

La Faloise burst forth at once:

"But, my dear girl, Boum's all rot! Don't choose him! Gasc himself is chucking up backing his own horse. And your Lusignan—never! Why, it's all humbug! By Lamb and Princess—just think! By Lamb and Princess—no, by Jove! All too short in the legs!"

He was choking. Philippe pointed out that, notwithstanding this, Lusignan had won the Prix des Cars and the Grande Poule des Produits. But the other ran on again. What did that prove? Nothing at all. On the contrary, one ought to distrust him. And besides, Gresham rode Lusignan; well then, let them jolly well dry up! Gresham had had luck; he would never get to the post.

And from one end of the field to the other the discussion raging in Nana's landau seemed to spread and increase. Voices were raised in a scream; the passion for gambling filled the air, set faces glowing and arms waving excitedly, while the bookmakers, perched on their conveyances, shouted odds and jotted down amounts right furiously. Yet these were only the small fry of the betting world; the big bets were made in the weighing enclosure. Here, then, raged the keen contest of people with light purses who risked their five-franc pieces and displayed infinite covetousness for the sake of a possible gain of a few louis. In a word, the battle would be between Spirit and Lusignan. Englishmen, plainly recognizable as such, were strolling about among the various groups. They were quite at home; their faces were fiery with excitement; they were already triumphant. Bramah, a horse belonging to Lord Reading, had gained the Grand Prix the previous year, and this had been a defeat over which hearts were still bleeding. This year it would be terrible if France were beaten anew. Accordingly all the ladies were wild with national pride. The Vandeuvres stable became the rampart of their honor, and Lusignan was pushed and defended and applauded exceedingly. Gaga, Blanche, Caroline and the rest betted on Lusignan. Lucy Stewart abstained from this on account of her son, but it was bruited abroad that Rose Mignon had commissioned Labor-dette to risk two hundred louis for her. The Tricon, as she sat alone next her driver, waited till the last moment. Very cool, indeed, amid all these disputes, very far above the ever-increasing uproar in which horses' names kept recurring and lively Parisian phrases mingled with guttural English exclamations, she sat listening and taking notes majestically.

"And Nana?" said Georges. "Does no one want her?"

Indeed, nobody was asking for the filly; she was not even being mentioned. The outsider of the Vandeuvres's stud was swamped by Lusignan's popularity. But La Faloise flung his arms up, crying:

"I've an inspiration. I'll bet a louis on Nana."

"Bravo! I bet a couple," said Georges.

"And I three," added Philippe.

And they mounted up and up, bidding against one another good-humoredly and naming prices as though they had been haggling over Nana at an auction.

La Faloise said he would cover her with gold. Besides, everybody was to be made to back her; they would go and pick up backers. But as the three young men were darting off to propagandize, Nana shouted after them:

"You know I don't want to have anything to do with her; I don't for the world! Georges, ten louis on Lusignan and five on Valerio II."

Meanwhile they had started fairly off, and she watched them gaily as they slipped between wheels, ducked under horses' heads and scoured the whole field. The moment they recognized anyone in a carriage they rushed up and urged Nana's claims. And there were great bursts of laughter among the crowd when sometimes they turned back, triumphantly signaling amounts with their fingers, while the young woman stood and waved her sunshade. Nevertheless, they made poor enough work of it. Some men let themselves be persuaded; Steiner, for instance, ventured three louis, for the sight of Nana stirred him. But the women refused point-blank. "Thanks," they said; "to lose for a certainty!" Besides, they were in no hurry to work for the benefit of a dirty wench who was overwhelming them all with her four white horses, her postilions and her outrageous assumption of side. Gaga and Clarisse looked exceedingly prim and asked La Faloise whether he was jolly well making fun of them. When Georges boldly presented himself before the Mignons' carriage Rose turned her head away in the most marked manner and did not answer him. One must be a pretty foul sort to let one's name be given to a horse! Mignon, on the contrary, followed the young man's movements with a look of amusement and declared that the women always brought luck.

"Well?" queried Nana when the young men returned after a prolonged visit to the bookmakers.

"The odds are forty to one against you," said La Faloise.

"What's that? Forty to one!" she cried, astounded. "They were fifty to one against me. What's happened?"

Labordette had just then reappeared. The course was being cleared, and the pealing of a bell announced the first race. Amid the expectant murmur of the bystanders she questioned him about this sudden rise in her value. But he replied evasively; doubtless a demand for her had arisen. She had to content herself with this explanation. Moreover, Labordette announced with a pre-occupied expression that Vandeuvres was coming if he could get away.

The race was ending unnoticed; people were all waiting for the Grand Prix to be run—when a storm burst over the Hippodrome. For some minutes past the sun had disappeared, and a wan twilight had darkened over the multitude. Then the wind rose, and there ensued a sudden deluge. Huge drops, perfect sheets of water, fell. There was a momentary confusion, and people shouted and joked and swore, while those on foot scampered madly off to find refuge under the canvas of the drinking booths. In the carriages the women did their best to shelter themselves, grasping their sunshades with both hands, while the bewildered footmen ran to the hoods. But the shower was already nearly over, and the sun began shining brilliantly through escaping clouds of fine rain. A blue cleft opened in the stormy mass, which was blown off over the Bois, and the skies seemed to smile again and to set the women laughing in a reassured

manner, while amid the snorting of horses and the disarray and agitation of the drenched multitude that was shaking itself dry a broad flush of golden light lit up the field, still dripping and glittering with crystal drops.

"Oh, that poor, dear Louiset!" said Nana. "Are you very drenched, my darling?"

The little thing silently allowed his hands to be wiped. The young woman had taken out her handkerchief. Then she dabbed it over Bijou, who was trembling more violently than ever. It would not matter in the least; there were a few drops on the white satin of her dress, but she didn't care a pin for them. The bouquets, refreshed by the rain, glowed like snow, and she smelled one ecstatically, drenching her lips in it as though it were wet with dew.

Meanwhile the burst of rain had suddenly filled the stands. Nana looked at them through her field glasses. At that distance you could only distinguish a compact, confused mass of people, heaped up, as it were, on the ascending ranges of steps, a dark background relieved by light dots which were human faces. The sunlight filtered in through openings near the roof at each end of the stand and detached and illumined portions of the seated multitude, where the ladies' dresses seemed to lose their distinguishing colors. But Nana was especially amused by the ladies whom the shower had driven from the rows of chairs ranged on the sand at the base of the stands. As courtesans were absolutely forbidden to enter the enclosure, she began making exceedingly bitter remarks about all the fashionable women therein assembled. She thought them fearfully dressed up, and such guys!

There was a rumor that the empress was entering the little central stand, a pavilion built like a chalet, with a wide balcony furnished with red armchairs.

"Why, there he is!" said Georges. "I didn't think he was on duty this week."

The stiff and solemn form of the Count Muffat had appeared behind the empress. Thereupon the young men jested and were sorry that Satin wasn't there to go and dig him in the ribs. But Nana's field glass focused the head of the Prince of Scots in the imperial stand.

"Gracious, it's Charles!" she cried.

She thought him stouter than formerly. In eighteen months he had broadened, and with that she entered into particulars. Oh yes, he was a big, solidly built fellow!

All round her in the ladies' carriages they were whispering that the count had given her up. It was quite a long story. Since he had been making himself noticeable, the Tuileries had grown scandalized at the chamberlain's conduct. Whereupon, in order to retain his position, he had recently broken it off with Nana. La Faloise bluntly reported this account of matters to the young woman and, addressing her as his Juliet, again offered himself. But she laughed merrily and remarked:

"It's idiotic! You won't know him; I've only to say, 'Come here,' for him to chuck up everything."

For some seconds past she had been examining the Countess Sabine and Estelle. Daguenet was still at their side. Fauchery had just arrived and was disturbing the people round him in his desire to make his bow to them. He, too,

stayed smilingly beside them. After that Nana pointed with disdainful action at the stands and continued:

"Then, you know, those people don't fetch me any longer now! I know 'em too well. You should see 'em behind scenes. No more honor! It's all up with honor! Filth belowstairs, filth abovestairs, filth everywhere. That's why I won't be bothered about 'em!"

And with a comprehensive gesture she took in everybody, from the grooms leading the horses on to the course to the sovereign lady busy chatting with with Charles, a prince and a dirty fellow to boot.

"Bravo, Nana! Awfully smart, Nana!" cried La Faloise enthusiastically.

The tolling of a bell was lost in the wind; the races continued. The Prix d'Ispahan had just been run for and Berlingot, a horse belonging to the Méchain stable, had won. Nana recalled Labordette in order to obtain news of the hundred louis, but he burst out laughing and refused to let her know the horses he had chosen for her, so as not to disturb the luck, as he phrased it. Her money was well placed; she would see that all in good time. And when she confessed her bets to him and told him how she had put ten louis on Lusignan and five on Valerio II, he shrugged his shoulders, as who should say that women did stupid things whatever happened. His action surprised her; she was quite at sea.

Just then the field grew more animated than before. Open-air lunches were arranged in the interval before the Grand Prix. There was much eating and more drinking in all directions, on the grass, on the high seats of the four-in-hands and mail coaches, in the victorias, the broughams, the landaus. There was a universal spread of cold viands and a fine disorderly display of champagne baskets which footmen kept handing down out of the coach boots. Corks came out with feeble pops, which the wind drowned. There was an interchange of jests, and the sound of breaking glasses imparted a note of discord to the high-strung gaiety of the scene. Gaga and Clarisse, together with Blanche, were making a serious repast, for they were eating sandwiches on the carriage rug with which they had been covering their knees. Louise Violaine had got down from her basket carriage and had joined Caroline Héquet. On the turf at their feet some gentlemen had instituted a drinking bar, whither Tatan, Maria, Simonne and the rest came to refresh themselves, while high in air and close at hand bottles were being emptied on Léa de Horn's mail coach, and, with infinite bravado and gesticulation, a whole band were making themselves tipsy in the sunshine, above the heads of the crowd. Soon, however, there was an especially large crowd by Nana's landau. She had risen to her feet and had set herself to pour out glasses of champagne for the men who came to pay her their respects. François, one of the footmen, was passing up the bottles while La Faloise, trying hard to imitate a coster's accents, kept pattering away:

"Ere y're, given away, given away! There's some for everybody!"

"Do be still, dear boy," Nana ended by saying. "We look like a set of tumblers."

She thought him very droll and was greatly entertained. At one moment she

conceived the idea of sending Georges with a glass of champagne to Rose Mignon, who was affecting temperance. Henri and Charles were bored to distraction; they would have been glad of some champagne, the poor little fellows. But Georges drank the glassful, for he feared an argument. Then Nana remembered Louiset, who was sitting forgotten behind her. Maybe he was thirsty, and she forced him to take a drop or two of wine, which made him cough dreadfully.

"'Ere y'are, 'ere y'are, gemmen!" La Faloise reiterated. "It don't cost two sous; it don't cost one. We give it away."

But Nana broke in with an exclamation:

"Gracious, there's Bordenave down there! Call him. Oh, run, please, please do!"

It was indeed Bordenave. He was strolling about with his hands behind his back, wearing a hat that looked rusty in the sunlight and a greasy frock coat that was glossy at the seams. It was Bordenave shattered by bankruptcy, yet furious despite all reverses, a Bordenave who flaunted his misery among all the fine folks with the hardihood becoming a man ever ready to take Dame Fortune by storm.

"The deuce, how smart we are!" he said when Nana extended her hand to him like the good-natured wench she was.

Presently, after emptying a glass of champagne, he gave vent to the following profoundly regretful phrase:

"Ah, if only I were a woman! But, by God, that's nothing! Would you like to go on the stage again? I've a notion: I'll hire the Gaîté, and we'll gobble up Paris between us. You certainly owe it me, eh?"

And he lingered, grumbling, beside her, though glad to see her again; for, he said, that confounded Nana was balm to his feelings. Yes, it was balm to them merely to exist in her presence! She was his daughter; she was blood of his blood!

The circle increased, for now La Faloise was filling glasses, and Georges and Philippe were picking up friends. A stealthy impulse was gradually bringing in the whole field. Nana would fling everyone a laughing smile or an amusing phrase. The groups of tipplers were drawing near, and all the champagne scattered over the place was moving in her direction. Soon there was only one noisy crowd, and that was round her landau, where she queened it among outstretched glasses, her yellow hair floating on the breeze and her snowy face bathed in the sunshine. Then by way of a finishing touch and to make the other women, who were mad at her triumph, simply perish of envy, she lifted a brimming glass on high and assumed her old pose as Venus Victrix.

But somebody touched her shoulder, and she was surprised, on turning round, to see Mignon on the seat. She vanished from view an instant and sat herself down beside him, for he had come to communicate a matter of importance. Mignon had everywhere declared that it was ridiculous of his wife to bear Nana a grudge; he thought her attitude stupid and useless.

"Look here, my dear," he whispered. "Be careful: don't madden Rose too

much. You understand, I think it best to warn you. Yes, she's got a weapon in store, and as she's never forgiven you the *Petite Duchesse* business—"

"A weapon," said Nana; "what's that blooming well got to do with me?"

"Just listen: it's a letter she must have found in Fauchery's pocket, a letter written to that screw Fauchery by the Countess Muffat. And, by Jove, it's clear the whole story's in it. Well then, Rose wants to send the letter to the count so as to be revenged on him and on you."

"What the deuce has that got to do with me?" Nana repeated. "It's a funny business. So the whole story about Fauchery's in it! Very well, so much the better; the woman has been exasperating me! We shall have a good laugh!"

"No, I don't wish it," Mignon briskly rejoined. "There 'll be a pretty scandal! Besides, we've got nothing to gain."

He paused, fearing lest he should say too much, while she loudly averred that she was most certainly not going to get a chaste woman into trouble.

But when he still insisted on his refusal she looked steadily at him. Doubtless he was afraid of seeing Fauchery again introduced into his family in case he broke with the countess. While avenging her own wrongs, Rose was anxious for that to happen, since she still felt a kindness toward the journalist. And Nana waxed meditative and thought of M. Venot's call, and a plan began to take shape in her brain, while Mignon was doing his best to talk her over.

"Let's suppose that Rose sends the letter, eh? There's food for scandal: you're mixed up in the business, and people say you're the cause of it all. Then to begin with, the count separates from his wife."

"Why should he?" she said. "On the contrary—"

She broke off, in her turn. There was no need for her to think aloud. So in order to be rid of Mignon she looked as though she entered into his view of the case, and when he advised her to give Rose some proof of her submission—to pay her a short visit on the racecourse, for instance, where everybody would see her—she replied that she would see about it, that she would think the matter over.

A commotion caused her to stand up again. On the course the horses were coming in amid a sudden blast of wind. The prize given by the city of Paris had just been run for, and Cornemuse had gained it. Now the Grand Prix was about to be run, and the fever of the crowd increased, and they were tortured by anxiety and stamped and swayed as though they wanted to make the minutes fly faster. At this ultimate moment the betting world was surprised and startled by the continued shortening of the odds against Nana, the outsider of the Vandeuvres stables. Gentlemen kept returning every few moments with a new quotation: the betting was thirty to one against Nana; it was twenty-five to one against Nana, then twenty to one, then fifteen to one. No one could understand it. A filly beaten on all the racecourses! A filly which that same morning no single sportsman would take at fifty to one against! What did this sudden madness betoken? Some laughed at it and spoke of the pretty doing awaiting the duffers who were being taken in by the joke. Others looked serious and uneasy and sniffed out something ugly under it all. Perhaps there was a "deal" in the offing. Allusion was made to well-known

stories about the robberies which are winked at on racecourses, but on this occasion the great name of Vandeuves put a stop to all such accusations, and the skeptics in the end prevailed when they prophesied that Nana would come in last of all.

"Who's riding Nana?" queried La Faloise.

Just then the real Nana reappeared, whereat the gentlemen lent his question an indecent meaning and burst into an uproarious fit of laughter. Nana bowed.

"Price is up," she replied.

And with that the discussion began again. Price was an English celebrity. Why had Vandeuves got this jockey to come over, seeing that Gresham ordinarily rode Nana? Besides, they were astonished to see him confiding Lusignan to this man Gresham, who, according to La Faloise, never got a place. But all these remarks were swallowed up in jokes, contradictions and an extraordinarily noisy confusion of opinions. In order to kill time the company once more set themselves to drain bottles of champagne. Presently a whisper ran round, and the different groups opened outward. It was Vandeuves. Nana affected vexation.

"Dear me, you're a nice fellow to come at this time of day! Why, I'm burning to see the enclosure."

"Well, come along then," he said; "there's still time. You'll take a stroll round with me. I just happen to have a permit for a lady about me."

And he led her off on his arm while she enjoyed the jealous glances with which Lucy, Caroline and the others followed her. The young Hugons and La Faloise remained in the landau behind her retreating figure and continued to do the honors of her champagne. She shouted to them that she would return immediately.

But Vandeuves caught sight of Labordette and called him, and there was an interchange of brief sentences.

"You've scraped everything up?"

"Yes."

"To what amount?"

"Fifteen hundred louis—pretty well all over the place."

As Nana was visibly listening, and that with much curiosity, they held their tongues. Vandeuves was very nervous, and he had those same clear eyes, shot with little flames, which so frightened her the night he spoke of burning himself and his horses together. As they crossed over the course she spoke low and familiarly.

"I say, do explain this to me. Why are the odds on your filly changing?"

He trembled, and this sentence escaped him:

"Ah, they're talking, are they? What a set those betting men are! When I've got the favorite they all throw themselves upon him, and there's no chance for me. After that, when an outsider's asked for, they give tongue and yell as though they were being skinned."

"You ought to tell me what's going to happen—I've made my bets," she rejoined. "Has Nana a chance?"

A sudden, unreasonable burst of anger overpowered him.

"Won't you deuced well let me be, eh? Every horse has a chance. The odds are shortening because, by Jove, people have taken the horse. Who, I don't know. I should prefer leaving you if you must needs badger me with your idiotic questions."

Such a tone was not germane either to his temperament or his habits, and Nana was rather surprised than wounded. Besides, he was ashamed of himself directly afterward, and when she begged him in a dry voice to behave politely he apologized. For some time past he had suffered from such sudden changes of temper. No one in the Paris of pleasure or of society was ignorant of the fact that he was playing his last trump card today. If his horses did not win, if, moreover, they lost him the considerable sums wagered upon them, it would mean utter disaster and collapse for him, and the bulwark of his credit and the lofty appearance which, though undermined, he still kept up, would come ruining noisily down. Moreover, no one was ignorant of the fact that Nana was the devouring siren who had finished him off, who had been the last to attack his crumbling fortunes and to sweep up what remained of them. Stories were told of wild whims and fancies, of gold scattered to the four winds, of a visit to Baden-Baden, where she had not left him enough to pay the hotel bill, of a handful of diamonds cast on the fire during an evening of drunkenness in order to see whether they would burn like coal. Little by little her great limbs and her coarse, plebeian way of laughing had gained complete mastery over this elegant, degenerate son of an ancient race. At that time he was risking his all, for he had been so utterly overpowered by his taste for ordure and stupidity as to have even lost the vigor of his skepticism. A week before Nana had made him promise her a château on the Norman coast between Havre and Trouville, and now he was staking the very foundations of his honor on the fulfillment of his word. Only she was getting on his nerves, and he could have beaten her, so stupid did he feel her to be.

The man at the gate, not daring to stop the woman hanging on the count's arm, had allowed them to enter the enclosure. Nana, greatly puffed up at the thought that at last she was setting foot on the forbidden ground, put on her best behavior and walked slowly by the ladies seated at the foot of the stands. On ten rows of chairs the toilets were densely massed, and in the blithe open air their bright colors mingled harmoniously. Chairs were scattered about, and as people met one another friendly circles were formed, just as though the company had been sitting under the trees in a public garden. Children had been allowed to go free and were running from group to group, while overhead the stands rose tier above crowded tier and the light-colored dresses therein faded into the delicate shadows of the timberwork. Nana stared at all these ladies. She stared steadily and markedly at the Countess Sabine. After which, as she was passing in front of the imperial stand, the sight of Muffat, looming in all his official stiffness by the side of the empress, made her very merry.

"Oh, how silly he looks!" she said at the top of her voice to Vandeuvres.

She was anxious to pay everything a visit. This small parklike region, with its green lawns and groups of trees, rather charmed her than otherwise. A

vendor of ices had set up a large buffet near the entrance gates, and beneath a rustic thatched roof a dense throng of people were shouting and gesticulating. This was the ring. Close by were some empty stalls, and Nana was disappointed at discovering only a gendarme's horse there. Then there was the paddock, a small course some hundred meters in circumference, where a stable help was walking about Valerio II in his horsecloths. And, oh, what a lot of men on the graveled sidewalks, all of them with their tickets forming an orange-colored patch in their bottonholes! And what a continual parade of people in the open galleries of the grandstands! The scene interested her for a moment or two, but truly, it was not worth while getting the spleen because they didn't admit you inside here.

Daguenet and Fauchery passed by and bowed to her. She made them a sign, and they had to come up. Thereupon she made hay of the weighing-in enclosure. But she broke off abruptly:

"Dear me, there's the Marquis de Chouard! How old he's growing! That old man's killing himself! Is he still as mad about it as ever?"

Thereupon Daguenet described the old man's last brilliant stroke. The story dated from the day before yesterday, and no one knew it as yet. After dangleing about for months he had bought her daughter Amélie from Gaga for thirty thousand francs, they said.

"Good gracious! That's a nice business!" cried Nana in disgust. "Go in for the regular thing, please! But now that I come to think of it, that must be Lili down there on the grass with a lady in a brougham. I recognized the face. The old boy will have brought her out."

Vandeuvres was not listening; he was impatient and longed to get rid of her. But Fauchery having remarked at parting that if she had not seen the bookmakers she had seen nothing, the count was obliged to take her to them in spite of his obvious repugnance. And she was perfectly happy at once; that truly was a curious sight, she said!

Amid lawns bordered by young horse-chestnut trees there was a round open enclosure, where, forming a vast circle under the shadow of the tender green leaves, a dense line of bookmakers was waiting for betting men, as though they had been hucksters at a fair. In order to overtop and command the surrounding crowd they had taken up positions on wooden benches, and they were advertising their prices on the trees beside them. They had an ever-vigilant glance, and they booked wagers in answer to a single sign, a mere wink, so rapidly that certain curious onlookers watched them openmouthed, without being able to understand it all. Confusion reigned; prices were shouted, and any unexpected change in a quotation was received with something like tumult. Occasionally scouts entered the place at a run and redoubled the uproar as they stopped at the entrance to the rotunda and, at the tops of their voices, announced departures and arrivals. In this place, where the gambling fever was pulsing in the sunshine, such announcements were sure to raise a prolonged muttering sound.

"They *are* funny!" murmured Nana, greatly entertained.

"Their features look as if they had been put on the wrong way. Just you

see that big fellow there; I shouldn't care to meet him all alone in the middle of a wood."

But Vandeuvres pointed her out a bookmaker, once a shopman in a fancy repository, who had made three million francs in two years. He was slight of build, delicate and fair, and people all round him treated him with great respect. They smiled when they addressed him, while others took up positions close by in order to catch a glimpse of him.

They were at length leaving the ring when Vandeuvres nodded slightly to another bookmaker, who thereupon ventured to call him. It was one of his former coachmen, an enormous fellow with the shoulders of an ox and a high color. Now that he was trying his fortunes at race meetings on the strength of some mysteriously obtained capital, the count was doing his utmost to push him, confiding to him his secret bets and treating him on all occasions as a servant to whom one shows one's true character. Yet despite this protection, the man had in rapid succession lost very heavy sums, and today he, too, was playing his last card. There was blood in his eyes; he looked fit to drop with apoplexy.

"Well, Maréchal," queried the count in the lowest of voices, "to what amount have you laid odds?"

"To five thousand louis, Monsieur le Comte," replied the bookmaker, likewise lowering his voice. "A pretty job, eh? I'll confess to you that I've increased the odds; I've made it three to one."

Vandeuvres looked very much put out.

"No, no, I don't want you to do that. Put it at two to one again directly. I shan't tell you any more, Maréchal."

"Oh, how can it hurt, Monsieur le Comte, at this time o' day?" rejoined the other with the humble smile befitting an accomplice. "I had to attract the people so as to lay your two thousand louis."

At this Vandeuvres silenced him. But as he was going off Maréchal remembered something and was sorry he had not questioned him about the shortening of the odds on the filly. It would be a nice business for him if the filly stood a chance, seeing that he had just laid fifty to one about her in two hundreds.

Nana, though she did not understand a word of what the count was whispering, dared not, however, ask for new explanations. He seemed more nervous than before and abruptly handed her over to Labordette, whom they came upon in front of the weighing-in room.

"You'll take her back," he said. "I've got something on hand. Au revoir!"

And he entered the room, which was narrow and low-pitched and half filled with a great pair of scales. It was like a waiting room in a suburban station, and Nana was again hugely disillusioned, for she had been picturing to herself something on a very vast scale, a monumental machine, in fact, for weighing horses. Dear me, they only weighed the jockeys! Then it wasn't worth while making such a fuss with their weighing! In the scale a jockey with an idiotic expression was waiting, harness on knee, till a stout man in a frock coat should have done verifying his weight. At the door a stable help was holding a horse,

Cosinus, round which a silent and deeply interested throng was clustering.

The course was about to be cleared. Labordette hurried Nana but retraced his steps in order to show her a little man talking with Vandeuves at some distance from the rest.

"Dear me, there's Price!" he said.

"Ah yes, the man who's mounting me," she murmured laughingly.

And she declared him to be exquisitely ugly. All jockeys struck her as looking idiotic, doubtless, she said, because they were prevented from growing bigger. This particular jockey was a man of forty, and with his long, thin, deeply furrowed, hard, dead countenance, he looked like an old shriveled-up child. His body was knotty and so reduced in size that his blue jacket with its white sleeves looked as if it had been thrown over a lay figure.

"No," she resumed as she walked away, "he would never make me very happy, you know."

A mob of people were still crowding the course, the turf of which had been wet and trampled on till it had grown black. In front of the two telegraphs, which hung very high up on their cast-iron pillars, the crowd were jostling together with upturned faces, uproariously greeting the numbers of the different horses as an electric wire in connection with the weighing room made them appear. Gentlemen were pointing at programs: Pichenette had been scratched by his owner, and this caused some noise. However, Nana did not do more than cross over the course on Labordette's arm. The bell hanging on the flagstaff was ringing persistently to warn people to leave the course.

"Ah, my little dears," she said as she got up into her landau again, "their enclosure's all humbug!"

She was welcomed with acclamation; people around her clapped their hands.

"Bravo, Nana! Nana's ours again!"

What idiots they were, to be sure! Did they think she was the sort to cut old friends? She had come back just at the auspicious moment. Now then, 'tenshun! The race was beginning! And the champagne was accordingly forgotten, and everyone left off drinking.

But Nana was astonished to find Gaga in her carriage, sitting with Bijou and Louiset on her knees. Gaga had indeed decided on this course of action in order to be near La Faloise, but she told Nana that she had been anxious to kiss Baby. She adored children.

"By the by, what about Lili?" asked Nana. "That's certainly she over there in that old fellow's brougham. They've just told me something very nice!"

Gaga had adopted a lachrymose expression.

"My dear, it's made me ill," she said dolorously. "Yesterday I had to keep my bed, I cried so, and today I didn't think I should be able to come. You know what my opinions were, don't you? I didn't desire that kind of thing at all. I had her educated in a convent with a view to a good marriage. And then to think of the strict advice she had and the constant watching! Well, my dear, it was she who wished it. We had such a scene—tears—disagreeable speeches! It even got to such a point that I caught her a box on the ear. She was too much bored by existence, she said; she wanted to get out of it. By

and by, when she began to say, 'Tisn't you, after all, who've got the right to prevent me,' I said to her: 'you're a miserable wretch; you're bringing dishonor upon us. Begone!' And it was done. I consented to arrange about it. But my last hope's blooming well blasted, and, oh, I used to dream about such nice things!"

The noise of a quarrel caused them to rise. It was Georges in the act of defending Vandeuvres against certain vague rumors which were circulating among the various groups.

"Why should you say that he's laying off his own horse?" the young man was exclaiming. "Yesterday in the Salon des Courses he took the odds on Lusignan for a thousand louis."

"Yes, I was there," said Philippe in affirmation of this. "And he didn't put a single louis on Nana. If the betting's ten to one against Nana he's got nothing to win there. It's absurd to imagine people are so calculating. Where would his interest come in?"

Labordette was listening with a quiet expression. Shrugging his shoulders, he said:

"Oh, leave them alone; they must have their say. The count has again laid at least as much as five hundred louis on Lusignan, and if he's wanted Nana to run to a hundred louis it's because an owner ought always to look as if he believes in his horses."

"Oh, bosh! What the deuce does that matter to us?" shouted La Faloise with a wave of his arms. "Spirit's going to win! Down with France—bravo, England!"

A long shiver ran through the crowd, while a fresh peal from the bell announced the arrival of the horses upon the racecourse. At this Nana got up and stood on one of the seats of her carriage so as to obtain a better view, and in so doing she trampled the bouquets of roses and myosotis underfoot. With a sweeping glance she took in the wide, vast horizon. At this last feverish moment the course was empty and closed by gray barriers, between the posts of which stood a line of policemen. The strip of grass which lay muddy in front of her grew brighter as it stretched away and turned into a tender green carpet in the distance. In the middle landscape, as she lowered her eyes, she saw the field swarming with vast numbers of people, some on tiptoe, others perched on carriages, and all heaving and jostling in sudden passionate excitement.

Horses were neighing; tent canvases flapped, while equestrians urged their hacks forward amid a crowd of pedestrians rushing to get places along the barriers. When Nana turned in the direction of the stands on the other side the faces seemed diminished, and the dense masses of heads were only a confused and motley array, filling gangways, steps and terraces and looming in deep, dark, serried lines against the sky. And beyond these again she overlooked the plain surrounding the course. Behind the ivy-clad mill to the right, meadows, dotted over with great patches of umbrageous wood, stretched away into the distance, while opposite to her, as far as the Seine flowing at the foot of a hill, the avenues of the park intersected one another, filled at that

moment with long, motionless files of waiting carriages; and in the direction of Boulogne, on the left, the landscape widened anew and opened out toward the blue distances of Meudon through an avenue of paulownias, whose rosy, leafless tops were one stain of brilliant lake color. People were still arriving, and a long procession of human ants kept coming along the narrow ribbon of road which crossed the distance, while very far away, on the Paris side, the nonpaying public, herding like sheep among the wood, loomed in a moving line of little dark spots under the trees on the skirts of the Bois.

Suddenly a cheering influence warmed the hundred thousand souls who covered this part of the plain like insects swarming madly under the vast expanse of heaven. The sun, which had been hidden for about a quarter of an hour, made his appearance again and shone out amid a perfect sea of light. And everything flamed afresh: the women's sunshades turned into countless golden targets above the heads of the crowd. The sun was applauded, saluted with bursts of laughter. And people stretched their arms out as though to brush apart the clouds.

Meanwhile a solitary police officer advanced down the middle of the deserted racecourse, while higher up, on the left, a man appeared with a red flag in his hand.

"It's the starter, the Baron de Mauriac," said Labordette in reply to a question from Nana. All round the young woman exclamations were bursting from the men who were pressing to her very carriage step. They kept up a disconnected conversation, jerking out phrases under the immediate influence of passing impressions. Indeed, Philippe and Georges, Bordenave and La Faloise, could not be quiet.

"Don't shove! Let me see! Ah, the judge is getting into his box. D'you say it's Monsieur de Souvigny? You must have good eyesight—eh?—to be able to tell what half a head is out of a fakement like that! Do hold your tongue—the banner's going up. Here they are—'tenshun! Cosinus is the first!"

A red and yellow banner was flapping in mid-air at the top of a mast. The horses came on the course one by one; they were led by stableboys, and the jockeys were sitting idle-handed in the saddles, the sunlight making them look like bright dabs of color. After Cosinus appeared Hazard and Boum. Presently a murmur of approval greeted Spirit, a magnificent big brown bay, the harsh citron color and black of whose jockey were cheerlessly Britannic. Valerio II scored a success as he came in; he was small and very lively, and his colors were soft green bordered with pink. The two Vandeuvres horses were slow to make their appearance, but at last, in Frangipane's rear, the blue and white showed themselves. But Lusignan, a very dark bay of irreproachable shape, was almost forgotten amid the astonishment caused by Nana. People had not seen her looking like this before, for now the sudden sunlight was dyeing the chestnut filly the brilliant color of a girl's red-gold hair. She was shining in the light like a new gold coin; her chest was deep; her head and neck tapered lightly from the delicate, high-strung line of her long back.

"Gracious, she's got my hair!" cried Nana in an ecstasy. "You bet you know I'm proud of it!"

The men clambered up on the landau, and Bordenave narrowly escaped putting his foot on Louiset, whom his mother had forgotten. He took him up with an outburst of paternal grumbling and hoisted him on his shoulder, muttering at the same time:

"The poor little brat, he must be in it too! Wait a bit, I'll show you Mamma. Eh? Look at Mummy out there."

And as Bijou was scratching his legs, he took charge of him, too, while Nana, rejoicing in the brute that bore her name, glanced round at the other women to see how they took it. They were all raging madly. Just then on the summit of her cab the Tricon, who had not moved till that moment, began waving her hand and giving her bookmaker her orders above the heads of the crowd. Her instinct had at last prompted her; she was backing Nana.

La Faloise meanwhile was making an insufferable noise. He was getting wild over Frangipane.

"I've an inspiration," he kept shouting. "Just look at Frangipane. What an action, eh? I back Frangipane at eight to one. Who'll take me?"

"Do keep quiet now," said Labordette at last. "You'll be sorry for it if you do."

"Frangipane's a screw," Philippe declared. "He's been utterly blown upon already. You'll see the canter."

The horses had gone up to the right, and they now started for the preliminary canter, passing in loose order before the stands. Thereupon there was a passionate fresh burst of talk, and people all spoke at once.

"Lusignan's too long in the back, but he's very fit. Not a cent, I tell you, on Valerio II; he's nervous—gallops with his head up—it's a bad sign. Jove! Burne's riding Spirit. I tell you, he's got no shoulders. A well-made shoulder—that's the whole secret. No, decidedly, Spirit's too quiet. Now listen, Nana, I saw her after the Grande Poule des Produits, and she was dripping and draggled, and her sides were trembling like one o'clock. I lay twenty louis she isn't placed! Oh, shut up! He's boring us with his Frangipane. There's no time to make a bet now; there, they're off!"

Almost in tears, La Faloise was struggling to find a bookmaker. He had to be reasoned with. Everyone craned forward, but the first go-off was bad, the starter, who looked in the distance like a slim dash of blackness, not having lowered his flag. The horses came back to their places after galloping a moment or two. There were two more false starts. At length the starter got the horses together and sent them away with such address as to elicit shouts of applause.

"Splendid! No, it was mere chance! Never mind—it's done it!"

The outcries were smothered by the anxiety which tortured every breast. The betting stopped now, and the game was being played on the vast course itself. Silence reigned at the outset, as though everyone were holding his breath. White faces and trembling forms were stretched forward in all directions. At first Hazard and Cosinus made the running at the head of the rest; Valerio II followed close by, and the field came on in a confused mass behind. When they passed in front of the stands, thundering over the ground in their

course like a sudden stormwind, the mass was already some fourteen lengths in extent. Frangipane was last, and Nana was slightly behind Lusignan and Spirit.

"Egad!" muttered Labordette, "how the Englishman is pulling it off out there!"

The whole carriageload again burst out with phrases and exclamations. Everyone rose on tiptoe and followed the bright splashes of color which were the jockeys as they rushed through the sunlight.

At the rise Valerio II took the lead, while Cosinus and Hazard lost ground, and Lusignan and Spirit were running neck and neck with Nana still behind them.

"By jingo, the Englishman's gained! It's palpable!" said Bordenave. "Lusignan's in difficulties, and Valerio II can't stay."

"Well, it will be a pretty biz if the Englishman wins!" cried Philippe in an access of patriotic grief.

A feeling of anguish was beginning to choke all that crowded multitude. Another defeat! And with that a strange ardent prayer, which was almost religious, went up for Lusignan, while people heaped abuse on Spirit and his dismal mute of a jockey. Among the crowd scattered over the grass the wind of excitement put up whole groups of people and set their boot soles flashing in air as they ran. Horsemen crossed the green at a furious gallop. And Nana, who was slowly revolving on her own axis, saw beneath her a surging waste of beasts and men, a sea of heads swayed and stirred all round the course by the whirlwind of the race, which clove the horizon with the bright lightning flash of the jockeys. She had been following their movement from behind while the cruppers sped away and the legs seemed to grow longer as they raced and then diminished till they looked slender as strands of hair. Now the horses were running at the end of the course, and she caught a side view of them looking minute and delicate of outline against the green distances of the Bois. Then suddenly they vanished behind a great clump of trees growing in the middle of the Hippodrome.

"Don't talk about it!" cried Georges, who was still full of hope. "It isn't over yet. The Englishman's touched."

But La Faloise was again seized with contempt for his country and grew positively outrageous in his applause of Spirit. Bravo! That was right! France needed it! Spirit first and Frangipane second—that would be a nasty one for his native land! He exasperated Labordette, who threatened seriously to throw him off the carriage.

"Let's see how many minutes they'll be about it," said Bordenave peaceably, for though holding up Louiset, he had taken out his watch.

One after the other the horses reappeared from behind the clump of trees. There was stupefaction; a long murmur arose among the crowd. Valerio II was still leading, but Spirit was gaining on him, and behind him Lusignan had slackened while another horse was taking his place. People could not make this out all at once; they were confused about the colors. Then there was a burst of exclamations.

"But it's Nana! Nana? Get along! I tell you Lusignan hasn't budged. Dear me, yes, it's Nana. You can certainly recognize her by her golden color. D'you see her now? She's blazing away. Bravo, Nana! What a ripper she is! Bah, it doesn't matter a bit: she's making the running for Lusignan!"

For some seconds this was everybody's opinion. But little by little the filly kept gaining and gaining, spurting hard all the while. Thereupon a vast wave of feeling passed over the crowd, and the tail of horses in the rear ceased to interest. A supreme struggle was beginning between Spirit, Nana, Lusignan and Valerio II. They were pointed out; people estimated what ground they had gained or lost in disconnected, gasping phrases. And Nana, who had mounted up on the coach box, as though some power had lifted her thither, stood white and trembling and so deeply moved as not to be able to speak. At her side Labordette smiled as of old.

"The Englishman's in trouble, eh?" said Philippe joyously. "He's going badly."

"In any case, it's all up with Lusignan," shouted La Faloise. "Valerio II is coming forward. Look, there they are all four together."

The same phrase was in every mouth.

"What a rush, my dears! By God, what a rush!"

The squad of horses was now passing in front of them like a flash of lightning. Their approach was perceptible—the breath of it was as a distant muttering which increased at every second. The whole crowd had thrown themselves impetuously against the barriers, and a deep clamor issued from innumerable chests before the advance of the horses and drew nearer and nearer like the sound of a foaming tide. It was the last fierce outburst of colossal partisanship; a hundred thousand spectators were possessed by a single passion, burning with the same gambler's lust, as they gazed after the beasts, whose galloping feet were sweeping millions with them. The crowd pushed and crushed—fists were clenched; people gaped, openmouthed; every man was fighting for himself; every man with voice and gesture was madly speeding the horse of his choice. And the cry of all this multitude, a wild beast's cry despite the garb of civilization, grew ever more distinct:

"Here they come! Here they come! Here they come!"

But Nana was still gaining ground, and now Valerio II was distanced, and she was heading the race, with Spirit two or three necks behind. The rolling thunder of voices had increased. They were coming in; a storm of oaths greeted them from the landau.

"Gee up, Lusignan, you great coward! The Englishman's stunning! Do it again, old boy; do it again! Oh, that Valerio! It's sickening! Oh, the carcass! My ten louis damned well lost! Nana's the only one! Bravo, Nana! Bravo!"

And without being aware of it Nana, upon her seat, had begun jerking her hips and waist as though she were racing herself. She kept striking her side—she fancied it was a help to the filly. With each stroke she sighed with fatigue and said in low, anguished tones:

"Go it, go it!"

Then a splendid sight was witnessed. Price, rising in his stirrups and bran-

dishing his whip, flogged Nana with an arm of iron. The old shriveled-up child with his long, hard, dead face seemed to breath flame. And in a fit of furious audacity and triumphant will he put his heart into the filly, held her up, lifted her forward, drenched in foam, with eyes of blood. The whole rush of horses passed with a roar of thunder: it took away people's breaths; it swept the air with it while the judge sat frigidly waiting, his eye adjusted to its task. Then there was an immense re-echoing burst of acclamation. With a supreme effort Price had just flung Nana past the post, thus beating Spirit by a head.

There was an uproar as of a rising tide. "Nana! Nana! Nana!" The cry rolled up and swelled with the violence of a tempest, till little by little it filled the distance, the depths of the Bois as far as Mont Valérien, the meadows of Longchamps and the Plaine de Boulogne. In all parts of the field the wildest enthusiasm declared itself. "Vive Nana! Vive la France! Down with England!" The women waved their sunshades; men leaped and spun round, vociferating as they did so, while others with shouts of nervous laughter threw their hats in the air. And from the other side of the course the enclosure made answer; the people on the stands were stirred, though nothing was distinctly visible save a tremulous motion of the air, as though an invisible flame were burning in a brazier above the living mass of gesticulating arms and little wildly moving faces, where the eyes and gaping mouths looked like black dots. The noise did not cease but swelled up and recommenced in the recesses of faraway avenues and among the people encamped under the trees, till it spread on and on and attained its climax in the imperial stand, where the empress herself had applauded. "Nana! Nana! Nana!" The cry rose heavenward in the glorious sunlight, whose golden rain beat fiercely on the dizzy heads of the multitude.

Then Nana, looming large on the seat of her landau, fancied that it was she whom they were applauding. For a moment or two she had stood devoid of motion, stupefied by her triumph, gazing at the course as it was invaded by so dense a flood of people that the turf became invisible beneath the sea of black hats. By and by, when this crowd had become somewhat less disorderly and a lane had been formed as far as the exit and Nana was again applauded as she went off with Price hanging lifelessly and vacantly over her neck, she smacked her thigh energetically, lost all self-possession, triumphed in crude phrases:

"Oh, by God, it's me; it's me. Oh, by God, what luck!"

And, scarce knowing how to give expression to her overwhelming joy, she hugged and kissed Louiset, whom she now discovered high in the air on Bordenave's shoulder.

"Three minutes and fourteen seconds," said the latter as he put his watch back in his pocket.

Nana kept hearing her name; the whole plain was echoing it back to her. Her people were applauding her while she towered above them in the sunlight, in the splendor of her starry hair and white-and-sky-blue dress. Labor-dette, as he made off, had just announced to her a gain of two thousand louis, for he had put her fifty on Nana at forty to one. But the money stirred her

less than this unforeseen victory, the fame of which made her queen of Paris. All the other ladies were losers. With a raging movement Rose Mignon had snapped her sunshade, and Caroline Héquet and Clarisse and Simonne—nay, Lucy Stewart herself, despite the presence of her son—were swearing low in their exasperation at that great wench's luck, while the Tricon, who had made the sign of the cross at both start and finish, straightened up her tall form above them, went into an ecstasy over her intuition and damned Nana admiringly as became an experienced matron.

Meanwhile round the landau the crush of men increased. The band of Nana's immediate followers had made a fierce uproar, and now Georges, choking with emotion, continued shouting all by himself in breaking tones. As the champagne had given out, Philippe, taking the footmen with him, had run to the wine bars. Nana's court was growing and growing, and her present triumph caused many loiterers to join her. Indeed, that movement which had made her carriage a center of attraction to the whole field was now ending in an apotheosis, and Queen Venus was enthroned amid suddenly maddened subjects. Bordenave, behind her, was muttering oaths, for he yearned to her as a father. Steiner himself had been reconquered—he had deserted Simonne and had hoisted himself upon one of Nana's carriage steps. When the champagne had arrived, when she lifted her brimming glass, such applause burst forth, and "Nana! Nana! Nana!" was so loudly repeated that the crowd looked round in astonishment for the filly, nor could any tell whether it was the horse or the woman that filled all hearts.

While this was going on Mignon came hastening up in defiance of Rose's terrible frown. That confounded girl simply maddened him, and he wanted to kiss her. Then after imprinting a paternal salute on both her cheeks:

"What bothers me," he said, "is that now Rose is certainly going to send the letter. She's raging, too, fearfully."

"So much the better! It'll do my business for me!" Nana let slip.

But noting his utter astonishment, she hastily continued:

"No, no, what am I saying? Indeed, I don't rightly know what I'm saying now! I'm drunk."

And drunk, indeed, drunk with joy, drunk with sunshine, she still raised her glass on high and applauded herself.

"To Nana! To Nana!" she cried amid a redoubled uproar of laughter and bravoes, which little by little overspread the whole Hippodrome.

The races were ending, and the Prix Vaublanc was run for. Carriages began driving off one by one. Meanwhile, amid much disputing, the name of Vandevres was again mentioned. It was quite evident now: for two years past Vandevres had been preparing his final stroke and had accordingly told Gresham to hold Nana in, while he had only brought Lusignan forward in order to make play for the filly. The losers were vexed; the winners shrugged their shoulders. After all, wasn't the thing permissible? An owner was free to run his stud in his own way. Many others had done as he had! In fact, the majority thought Vandevres had displayed great skill in raking in all he could get about Nana through the agency of friends, a course of action which

explained the sudden shortening of the odds. People spoke of his having laid two thousand louis on the horse, which, supposing the odds to be thirty to one against, gave him twelve hundred thousand francs, an amount so vast as to inspire respect and to excuse everything.

But other rumors of a very serious nature were being whispered about: they issued in the first instance from the enclosure, and the men who returned thence were full of exact particulars. Voices were raised; an atrocious scandal began to be openly canvassed. That poor fellow Vandeuvres was done for; he had spoiled his splendid hit with a piece of flat stupidity, an idiotic robbery, for he had commissioned Maréchal, a shady bookmaker, to lay two thousand louis on his account against Lusignan, in order thereby to get back his thousand and odd openly wagered louis. It was a miserable business, and it proved to be the last rift necessary to the utter breakup of his fortune. The bookmaker being thus warned that the favorite would not win, had realized some sixty thousand francs over the horse. Only Labordette, for lack of exact and detailed instructions, had just then gone to him to put two hundred louis on Nana, which the bookmaker, in his ignorance of the stroke actually intended, was still quoting at fifty to one against. Cleared of one hundred thousand francs over the filly and a loser to the tune of forty thousand, Maréchal, who felt the world crumbling under his feet, had suddenly divined the situation when he saw the count and Labordette talking together in front of the enclosure just after the race was over. Furious, as became an ex-coachman of the count's, and brutally frank as only a cheated man can be, he had just made a frightful scene in public, had told the whole story in atrocious terms and had thrown everyone into angry excitement. It was further stated that the stewards were about to meet.

Nana, whom Philippe and Georges were whisperingly putting in possession of the facts, gave vent to a series of reflections and yet ceased not to laugh and drink. After all, it was quite likely; she remembered such things, and then that Maréchal had a dirty, hangdog look. Nevertheless, she was still rather doubtful when Labordette appeared. He was very white.

"Well?" she asked in a low voice.

"Bloody well smashed up!" he replied simply.

And he shrugged his shoulders. That Vandeuvres was a mere child! She made a bored little gesture.

That evening at the Bal Mabilles Nana obtained a colossal success. When toward ten o'clock she made her appearance, the uproar was already formidable. That classic night of madness had brought together all that was young and pleasure loving, and now this smart world was wallowing in the coarseness and imbecility of the servants' hall. There was a fierce crush under the festoons of gas lamps, and men in evening coats and women in outrageous low-necked old toilets, which they did not mind soiling, were howling and surging to and fro under the maddening influence of a vast drunken fit. At a distance of thirty paces the brass instruments of the orchestra were inaudible. Nobody was dancing. Stupid witticisms, repeated no one knew why, were going the round of the various groups. People were straining after wit

without succeeding in being funny. Seven women, imprisoned in the cloakroom, were crying to be set free. A shallot had been found, put up to auction and knocked down at two louis. Just then Nana arrived, still wearing her blue-and-white racecourse costume, and amid a thunder of applause the shallot was presented to her. People caught hold of her in her own despite, and three gentlemen bore her triumphantly into the garden, across ruined glassplots and ravaged masses of greenery. As the bandstand presented an obstacle to her advance, it was taken by storm, and chairs and music stands were smashed. A paternal police organized the disorder.

It was only on Tuesday that Nana recovered from the excitements of victory. That morning she was chatting with Mme Lerat, the old lady having come in to bring her news of Louiset, whom the open air had upset. A long story, which was occupying the attention of all Paris, interested her beyond measure. Vandeuves, after being warned off all racecourses and posted at the Cercle Imperial on the very evening after the disaster, had set fire to his stable on the morrow and had burned himself and his horses to death.

"He certainly told me he was going to," the young woman kept saying. "That man was a regular maniac! Oh, how they did frighten me when they told me about it yesterday evening! You see, he might easily have murdered me some fine night. And besides, oughtn't he to have given me a hint about his horse? I should at any rate have made my fortune! He said to Labordette that if I knew about the matter I would immediately inform my hairdresser and a whole lot of other men. How polite, eh? Oh dear, no, I certainly can't grieve much for him."

After some reflection she had grown very angry. Just then Labordette came in; he had seen about her bets and was now the bearer of some forty thousand francs. This only added to her bad temper, for she ought to have gained a million. Labordette, who during the whole of this episode had been pretending entire innocence, abandoned Vandeuves in decisive terms. Those old families, he opined, were worn out and apt to make a stupid ending.

"Oh dear no!" said Nana. "It isn't stupid to burn oneself in one's stable as he did. For my part, I think he made a dashing finish; but, oh, you know, I'm not defending that story about him and Maréchal. It's too silly. Just to think that Blanche has had the cheek to want to lay the blame of it on me! I said to her: 'Did I tell him to steal?' Don't you think one can ask a man for money without urging him to commit crime? If he had said to me, 'I've got nothing left,' I should have said to him, 'All right, let's part.' And the matter wouldn't have gone further."

"Just so," said the aunt gravely. "When men are obstinate about a thing, so much the worse for them!"

"But as to the merry little finish up, oh, that was awfully smart!" continued Nana. "It appears to have been terrible enough to give you the shudders! He sent everybody away and boxed himself up in the place with a lot of petroleum. And it blazed! You should have seen it! Just think, a great big affair, almost all made of wood and stuffed with hay and straw! The flames simply towered up, and the finest part of the business was that the horses didn't want

to be roasted. They could be heard plunging, throwing themselves against the doors, crying aloud just like human beings. Yes, people haven't got rid of the horror of it yet."

Labordette let a low, incredulous whistle escape him. For his part, he did not believe in the death of Vandeuvres. Somebody had sworn he had seen him escaping through a window. He had set fire to his stable in a fit of aberration, but when it had begun to grow too warm it must have sobered him. A man so besotted about the women and so utterly worn out could not possibly die so pluckily.

Nana listened in her disillusionment and could only remark:

"Oh, the poor wretch, it was so beautiful!"

CHAPTER XII

TOWARD one in the morning, in the great bed of the Venice point draperies, Nana and the count lay still awake. He had returned to her that evening after a three days' sulking fit. The room, which was dimly illumined by a lamp, seemed to slumber amid a warm, damp odor of love, while the furniture, with its white lacquer and silver incrustations, loomed vague and wan through the gloom. A curtain had been drawn to, so that the bed lay flooded with shadow. A sigh became audible; then a kiss broke the silence, and Nana, slipping off the coverlet, sat for a moment or two, barelegged, on the edge of the bed. The count let his head fall back on the pillow and remained in darkness.

"Dearest, you believe in the good God, don't you?" she queried after some moments' reflection. Her face was serious; she had been overcome by pious terrors on quitting her lover's arms.

Since morning, indeed, she had been complaining of feeling uncomfortable, and all her stupid notions, as she phrased it, notions about death and hell, were secretly torturing her. From time to time she had nights such as these, during which childish fears and atrocious fancies would thrill her with waking nightmares. She continued:

"I say, d'you think I shall go to heaven?"

And with that she shivered, while the count, in his surprise at her putting such singular questions at such a moment, felt his old religious remorse returning upon him. Then with her chemise slipping from her shoulders and her hair unpinned, she again threw herself upon his breast, sobbing and clinging to him as she did so.

"I'm afraid of dying! I'm afraid of dying!" He had all the trouble in the world to disengage himself. Indeed, he was himself afraid of giving in to the sudden madness of this woman clinging to his body in her dread of the Invisible. Such dread is contagious, and he reasoned with her. Her conduct was perfect—she had only to conduct herself well in order one day to merit pardon. But she shook her head. Doubtless she was doing no one any harm; nay, she was even in the constant habit of wearing a medal of the Virgin, which she showed to him as it hung by a red thread between her breasts.

Only it had been foreordained that all unmarried women who held conversation with men would go to hell. Scraps of her catechism recurred to her remembrance. Ah, if one only knew for certain, but, alas, one was sure of nothing; nobody ever brought back any information, and then, truly, it would be stupid to bother oneself about things if the priests were talking foolishness all the time. Nevertheless, she religiously kissed her medal, which was still warm from contact with her skin, as though by way of charm against death, the idea of which filled her with icy horror. Muffat was obliged to accompany her into the dressing room, for she shook at the idea of being alone there for one moment, even though she had left the door open. When he had lain down again she still roamed about the room, visiting its several corners and starting and shivering at the slightest noise. A mirror stopped her, and as of old she lapsed into obvious contemplation of her nakedness. But the sight of her breast, her waist and her thighs only doubled her terror, and she ended by feeling with both hands very slowly over the bones of her face.

"You're ugly when you're dead," she said in deliberate tones.

And she pressed her cheeks, enlarging her eyes and pushing down her jaw, in order to see how she would look. Thus disfigured, she turned toward the count.

"Do look! My head 'll be quite small, it will!"

At this he grew vexed.

"You're mad; come to bed!"

He fancied he saw her in a grave, emaciated by a century of sleep, and he joined his hands and stammered a prayer. It was some time ago that the religious sense had reconquered him, and now his daily access of faith had again assumed the apoplectic intensity which was wont to leave him well-nigh stunned. The joints of his fingers used to crack, and he would repeat without cease these words only: "My God, my God, my God!" It was the cry of his impotence, the cry of that sin against which, though his damnation was certain, he felt powerless to strive. When Nana returned she found him hidden beneath the bedclothes; he was haggard; he had dug his nails into his bosom, and his eyes stared upward as though in search of heaven. And with that she started to weep again. Then they both embraced, and their teeth chattered they knew not why, as the same imbecile obsession overmastered them. They had already passed a similar night, but on this occasion the thing was utterly idiotic, as Nana declared when she ceased to be frightened. She suspected something, and this caused her to question the count in a prudent sort of way. It might be that Rose Mignon had sent the famous letter! But that was not the case; it was sheer fright, nothing more, for he was still ignorant whether he was a cuckold or no.

Two days later, after a fresh disappearance, Muffat presented himself in the morning, a time of day at which he never came. He was livid; his eyes were red and his whole man still shaken by a great internal struggle. But Zoé, being scared herself, did not notice his troubled state. She had run to meet him and now began crying:

"Oh, monsieur, do come in! Madame nearly died yesterday evening!"

And when he asked for particulars:

"Something it's impossible to believe has happened—a miscarriage, monsieur."

Nana had been in the family way for the past three months. For long she had simply thought herself out of sorts, and Dr Boutarel had himself been in doubt. But when afterward he made her a decisive announcement, she felt so bored thereby that she did all she possibly could to disguise her condition. Her nervous terrors, her dark humors, sprang to some extent from this unfortunate state of things, the secret of which she kept very shamefacedly, as became a courtesan mother who is obliged to conceal her plight. The thing struck her as a ridiculous accident, which made her appear small in her own eyes and would, had it been known, have led people to chaff her.

"A poor joke, eh?" she said. "Bad luck, too, certainly."

She was necessarily very sharp set when she thought her last hour had come. There was no end to her surprise, too; her sexual economy seemed to her to have got out of order; it produced children then even when one did not want them and when one employed it for quite other purposes! Nature drove her to exasperation; this appearance of serious motherhood in a career of pleasure, this gift of life amid all the deaths she was spreading around, exasperated her. Why could one not dispose of oneself as fancy dictated, without all this fuss? And whence had this brat come? She could not even suggest a father. Ah, dear heaven, the man who made him would have a splendid notion had he kept him in his own hands, for nobody asked for him; he was in everybody's way, and he would certainly not have much happiness in life!

Meanwhile Zoé described the catastrophe.

"Madame was seized with colic toward four o'clock. When she didn't come back out of the dressing room I went in and found her lying stretched on the floor in a faint. Yes, monsieur, on the floor in a pool of blood, as though she had been murdered. Then I understood, you see. I was furious; Madame might quite well have confided her trouble to me. As it happened, Monsieur Georges was there, and he helped me to lift her up, and directly a miscarriage was mentioned he felt ill in his turn! Oh, it's true I've had the hump since yesterday!"

In fact, the house seemed utterly upset. All the servants were galloping upstairs, downstairs and through the rooms. Georges had passed the night on an armchair in the drawing room. It was he who had announced the news to Madame's friends at that hour of the evening when Madame was in the habit of receiving. He had still been very pale, and he had told his story very feelingly, and as though stupefied. Steiner, La Faloise, Philippe and others, besides, had presented themselves, and at the end of the lad's first phrase they burst into exclamations. The thing was impossible! It must be a farce! After which they grew serious and gazed with an embarrassed expression at her bedroom door. They shook their heads; it was no laughing matter.

Till midnight a dozen gentlemen had stood talking in low voices in front of the fireplace. All were friends; all were deeply exercised by the same idea

of paternity. They seemed to be mutually excusing themselves, and they looked as confused as if they had done something clumsy. Eventually, however, they put a bold face on the matter. It had nothing to do with them: the fault was hers! What a stunner that Nana was, eh? One would never have believed her capable of such a fake! And with that they departed one by one, walking on tiptoe, as though in a chamber of death where you cannot laugh.

"Come up all the same, monsieur," said Zoé to Muffat. "Madame is much better and will see you. We are expecting the doctor, who promised to come back this morning."

The lady's maid had persuaded Georges to go back home to sleep, and upstairs in the drawing room only Satin remained. She lay stretched on a divan, smoking a cigarette and scanning the ceiling. Amid the household scare which had followed the accident she had been white with rage, had shrugged her shoulders violently and had made ferocious remarks. Accordingly, when Zoé was passing in front of her and telling Monsieur that poor, dear Madame had suffered a great deal:

"That's right; it'll teach him!" said Satin curtly.

They turned round in surprise, but she had not moved a muscle; her eyes were still turned toward the ceiling, and her cigarette was still wedged tightly between her lips.

"Dear me, you're charming, you are!" said Zoé.

But Satin sat up, looked savagely at the count and once more hurled her remark at him.

"That's right; it'll teach him!"

And she lay down again and blew forth a thin jet of smoke, as though she had no interest in present events and were resolved not to meddle in any of them. No, it was all too silly!

Zoé, however, introduced Muffat into the bedroom, where a scent of ether lingered amid warm, heavy silence, scarce broken by the dull roll of occasional carriages in the Avenue de Villiers. Nana, looking very white on her pillow, was lying awake with wide-open, meditative eyes. She smiled when she saw the count but did not move.

"Ah, dear pet!" she slowly murmured. "I really thought I should never see you again."

Then as he leaned forward to kiss her on the hair, she grew tender toward him and spoke frankly about the child, as though he were its father.

"I never dared tell you; I felt so happy about it! Oh, I used to dream about it; I should have liked to be worthy of you! And now there's nothing left. Ah well, perhaps that's best. I don't want to bring a stumbling block into your life."

Astounded by this story of paternity, he began stammering vague phrases. He had taken a chair and had sat down by the bed, leaning one arm on the coverlet. Then the young woman noticed his wild expression, the blood reddening his eyes, the fever that set his lips quiver.

"What's the matter then?" she asked. "You're ill too."

"No," he answered with extreme difficulty.

She gazed at him with a profound expression. Then she signed to Zoé to retire, for the latter was lingering round arranging the medicine bottles. And when they were alone she drew him down to her and again asked:

"What's the matter with you, darling? The tears are ready to burst from your eyes—I can see that quite well. Well now, speak out; you've come to tell me something."

"No, no, I swear I haven't," he blurted out. But he was choking with suffering, and this sickroom, into which he had suddenly entered unawares, so worked on his feelings that he burst out sobbing and buried his face in the bedclothes to smother the violence of his grief. Nana understood. Rose Mignon had most assuredly decided to send the letter. She let him weep for some moments, and he was shaken by convulsions so fierce that the bed trembled under her. At length in accents of motherly compassion she queried:

"You've had bothers at your home?"

He nodded affirmatively. She paused anew, and then very low:

"Then you know all?"

He nodded assent. And a heavy silence fell over the chamber of suffering. The night before, on his return from a party given by the empress, he had received the letter Sabine had written her lover. After an atrocious night passed in the meditation of vengeance he had gone out in the morning in order to resist a longing which prompted him to kill his wife. Outside, under a sudden, sweet influence of a fine June morning, he had lost the thread of his thoughts and had come to Nana's, as he always came at terrible moments in his life. There only he gave way to his misery, for he felt a cowardly joy at the thought that she would console him.

"Now look here, be calm!" the young woman continued, becoming at the same time extremely kind. "I've known it a long time, but it was certainly not I that would have opened your eyes. You remember you had your doubts last year, but then things arranged themselves, owing to my prudence. In fact, you wanted proofs. The deuce, you've got one today, and I know it's hard lines. Nevertheless, you must look at the matter quietly: you're not dishonored because it's happened."

He had left off weeping. A sense of shame restrained him from saying what he wanted to, although he had long ago slipped into the most intimate confessions about his household. She had to encourage him. Dear me, she was a woman; she could understand everything. When in a dull voice he exclaimed:

"You're ill. What's the good of tiring you? It was stupid of me to have come. I'm going—"

"No," she answered briskly enough. "Stay! Perhaps I shall be able to give you some good advice. Only don't make me talk too much; the medical man's forbidden it."

He had ended by rising, and he was now walking up and down the room. Then she questioned him:

"Now what are you going to do?"

"I'm going to box the man's ears—by heavens, yes!"

She pursed up her lips disapprovingly.

"That's not very wise. And about your wife?"

"I shall go to law; I've proofs."

"Not at all wise, my dear boy. It's stupid even. You know I shall never let you do that!"

And in her feeble voice she showed him decisively how useless and scandalous a duel and a trial would be. He would be a nine days' newspaper sensation; his whole existence would be at stake, his peace of mind, his high situation at court, the honor of his name, and all for what? That he might have the laughers against him.

"What will it matter?" he cried. "I shall have had my revenge."

"My pet," she said, "in a business of that kind one never has one's revenge if one doesn't take it directly."

He paused and stammered. He was certainly no poltroon, but he felt that she was right. An uneasy feeling was growing momentarily stronger within him, a poor, shameful feeling which softened his anger now that it was at its hottest. Moreover, in her frank desire to tell him everything, she dealt him a fresh blow.

"And d'you want to know what's annoying you, dearest? Why, that you are deceiving your wife yourself. You don't sleep away from home for nothing, eh? Your wife must have her suspicions. Well then, how can you blame her? She'll tell you that you've set her the example, and that'll shut you up. There, now, that's why you're stamping about here instead of being at home murdering both of 'em."

Muffat had again sunk down on the chair; he was overwhelmed by these home thrusts. She broke off and took breath, and then in a low voice:

"Oh, I'm a wreck! Do help me sit up a bit. I keep slipping down, and my head's too low."

When he had helped her she sighed and felt more comfortable. And with that she harked back to the subject. What a pretty sight a divorce suit would be! Couldn't he imagine the advocate of the countess amusing Paris with his remarks about Nana? Everything would have come out—her fiasco at the Variétés, her house, her manner of life. Oh dear, no! She had no wish for all that amount of advertising. Some dirty women might, perhaps, have driven him to it for the sake of getting a thundering big advertisement, but she—she desired his happiness before all else. She had drawn him down toward her and, after passing her arm around his neck, was nursing his head close to hers on the edge of the pillow. And with that she whispered softly:

"Listen, my pet, you shall make it up with your wife."

But he rebelled at this. It could never be! His heart was nigh breaking at the thought; it was too shameful. Nevertheless, she kept tenderly insisting.

"You shall make it up with your wife. Come, come, you don't want to hear all the world saying that I've tempted you away from your home? I should have too vile a reputation! What would people think of me? Only swear that you'll always love me, because the moment you go with another woman—"

Tears choked her utterance, and he intervened with kisses and said:

"You're beside yourself; it's impossible!"

"Yes, yes," she rejoined, "you must. But I'll be reasonable. After all, she's your wife, and it isn't as if you were to play me false with the firstcomer."

And she continued in this strain, giving him the most excellent advice. She even spoke of God, and the count thought he was listening to M. Venot, when that old gentleman endeavored to sermonize him out of the grasp of sin. Nana, however, did not speak of breaking it off entirely: she preached indulgent good nature and suggested that, as became a dear, nice old fellow, he should divide his attentions between his wife and his mistress, so that they would all enjoy a quiet life, devoid of any kind of annoyance, something, in fact, in the nature of a happy slumber amid the inevitable miseries of existence. Their life would be nowise changed: he would still be the little man of her heart. Only he would come to her a bit less often and would give the countess the nights not passed with her. She had got to the end of her strength and left off, speaking under her breath:

"After that I shall feel I've done a good action, and you'll love me all the more."

Silence reigned. She had closed her eyes and lay wan upon her pillow. The count was patiently listening to her, not wishing her to tire herself. A whole minute went by before she reopened her eyes and murmured:

"Besides, how about the money? Where would you get the money from if you must grow angry and go to law? Labordette came for the bill yesterday. As for me, I'm out of everything; I have nothing to put on now."

Then she shut her eyes again and looked like one dead. A shadow of deep anguish had passed over Muffat's brow. Under the present stroke he had since yesterday forgotten the money troubles from which he knew not how to escape. Despite formal promises to the contrary, the bill for a hundred thousand francs had been put in circulation after being once renewed, and Labor-dette, pretending to be very miserable about it, threw all the blame on Francis, declaring that he would never again mix himself up in such a matter with an uneducated man. It was necessary to pay, for the count would never have allowed his signature to be protested. Then in addition to Nana's novel demands, his home expenses were extraordinarily confused. On their return from Les Fondettes the countess had suddenly manifested a taste for luxury, a longing for worldly pleasures, which was devouring their fortune. Her ruinous caprices began to be talked about. Their whole household management was altered, and five hundred thousand francs were squandered in utterly transforming the old house in the Rue Miromesnil. Then there were extravagantly magnificent gowns and large sums disappeared, squandered or perhaps given away, without her ever dreaming of accounting for them. Twice Muffat ventured to mention this, for he was anxious to know how the money went, but on these occasions she had smiled and gazed at him with so singular an expression that he dared not interrogate her further for fear of a too-unmistakable answer. If he were taking Daguenet as son-in-law as a gift from Nana it was chiefly with the hope of being able to reduce Estelle's

dower to two hundred thousand francs and of then being free to make any arrangements he chose about the remainder with a young man who was still rejoicing in this unexpected match.

Nevertheless, for the last week, under the immediate necessity of finding Labordette's hundred thousand francs, Muffat had been able to hit on but one expedient, from which he recoiled. This was that he should sell the Bordes, a magnificent property valued at half a million, which an uncle had recently left the countess. However, her signature was necessary, and she herself, according to the terms of the deed, could not alienate the property without the count's authorization. The day before he had indeed resolved to talk to his wife about this signature. And now everything was ruined; at such a moment he would never accept of such a compromise. This reflection added bitterness to the frightful disgrace of the adultery. He fully understood what Nana was asking for, since in that ever-growing self-abandonment which prompted him to put her in possession of all his secrets, he had complained to her of his position and had confided to her the tiresome difficulty he was in with regard to the signature of the countess.

Nana, however, did not seem to insist. She did not open her eyes again, and, seeing her so pale, he grew frightened and made her inhale a little ether. She gave a sigh and without mentioning Daguenet asked him some questions.

"When is the marriage?"

"We sign the contract on Tuesday, in five days' time," he replied.

Then still keeping her eyelids closed, as though she were speaking from the darkness and silence of her brain:

"Well then, pet, see to what you've got to do. As far as I'm concerned, I want everybody to be happy and comfortable."

He took her hand and soothed her. Yes, he would see about it; the important thing now was for her to rest. And the revolt within him ceased, for this warm and slumberous sickroom, with its all-pervading scent of ether, had ended by lulling him into a mere longing for happiness and peace. All his manhood, erewhile maddened by wrong, had departed out of him in the neighborhood of that warm bed and that suffering woman, whom he was nursing under the influence of her feverish heat and of remembered delights. He leaned over her and pressed her in a close embrace, while despite her unmoved features her lips wore a delicate, victorious smile. But Dr Boutarel made his appearance.

"Well, and how's this dear child?" he said familiarly to Muffat, whom he treated as her husband. "The deuce, but we've made her talk!"

The doctor was a good-looking man and still young. He had a superb practice among the gay world, and being very merry by nature and ready to laugh and joke in the friendliest way with the demimonde ladies with whom, however, he never went farther, he charged very high fees and got them paid with the greatest punctuality. Moreover, he would put himself out to visit them on the most trivial occasions, and Nana, who was always trembling at the fear of death, would send and fetch him two or three times a week

and would anxiously confide to him little infantile ills which he would cure to an accompaniment of amusing gossip and harebrained anecdotes. The ladies all adored him. But this time the little ill was serious.

Muffat withdrew, deeply moved. Seeing his poor Nana so very weak, his sole feeling was now one of tenderness. As he was leaving the room she motioned him back and gave him her forehead to kiss. In a low voice and with a playfully threatening look she said:

"You know what I've allowed you to do. Go back to your wife, or it's all over and I shall grow angry!"

The Countess Sabine had been anxious that her daughter's wedding contract should be signed on a Tuesday in order that the renovated house, where the paint was still scarcely dry, might be reopened with a grand entertainment. Five hundred invitations had been issued to people in all kinds of sets. On the morning of the great day the upholsterers were still nailing up hangings, and toward nine at night, just when the lusters were going to be lit, the architect, accompanied by the eager and interested countess, was given his final orders.

It was one of those spring festivities which have a delicate charm of their own. Owing to the warmth of the June nights, it had become possible to open the two doors of the great drawing room and to extend the dancing floor to the sanded paths of the garden. When the first guests arrived and were welcomed at the door by the count and the countess they were positively dazzled. One had only to recall to mind the drawing room of the past, through which flitted the icy, ghostly presence of the Countess Muffat, that antique room full of an atmosphere of religious austerity with its massive First Empire mahogany furniture, its yellow velvet hangings, its moldy ceiling through which the damp had soaked. Now from the very threshold of the entrance hall mosaics set off with gold were glittering under the lights of lofty candelabras, while the marble staircase unfurled, as it were, a delicately chiseled balustrade. Then, too, the drawing room looked splendid; it was hung with Genoa velvet, and a huge decorative design by Boucher covered the ceiling, a design for which the architect had paid a hundred thousand francs at the sale of the Château de Dampierre. The lusters and the crystal ornaments lit up a luxurious display of mirrors and precious furniture. It seemed as though Sabine's long chair, that solitary red silk chair, whose soft contours were so marked in the old days, had grown and spread till it filled the whole great house with voluptuous idleness and a sense of tense enjoyment not less fierce and hot than a fire which has been long in burning up.

People were already dancing. The band, which had been located in the garden, in front of one of the open windows, was playing a waltz, the supple rhythm of which came softly into the house through the intervening night air. And the garden seemed to spread away and away, bathed in transparent shadow and lit by Venetian lamps, while in a purple tent pitched on the edge of a lawn a table for refreshments had been established. The waltz, which was none other than the quaint, vulgar one in the *Blonde Venus*, with its

laughing, blackguard lilt, penetrated the old hotel with sonorous waves of sound and sent a feverish thrill along its walls. It was as though some fleshly wind had come up out of the common street and were sweeping the relics of a vanished epoch out of the proud old dwelling, bearing away the Muffats' past, the age of honor and religious faith which had long slumbered beneath the lofty ceilings.

Meanwhile near the hearth, in their accustomed places, the old friends of the count's mother were taking refuge. They felt out of their element—they were dazzled and they formed a little group amid the slowly invading mob. Mme du Joncquoy, unable to recognize the various rooms, had come in through the dining saloon. Mme Chantereau was gazing with a stupefied expression at the garden, which struck her as immense. Presently there was a sound of low voices, and the corner gave vent to all sorts of bitter reflections.

"I declare," murmured Mme Chantereau, "just fancy if the countess were to return to life. Why, can you not imagine her coming in among all these crowds of people! And then there's all this gilding and this uproar! It's scandalous!"

"Sabine's out of her senses," replied Mme du Joncquoy. "Did you see her at the door? Look, you can catch sight of her here; she's wearing all her diamonds."

For a moment or two they stood up in order to take a distant view of the count and countess. Sabine was in a white dress trimmed with marvelous English point lace. She was triumphant in beauty; she looked young and gay, and there was a touch of intoxication in her continual smile. Beside her stood Muffat, looking aged and a little pale, but he, too, was smiling in his calm and worthy fashion.

"And just to think that he was once master," continued Mme Chantereau, "and that not a single rout seat would have come in without his permission! Ah well, she's changed all that; it's her house now. D'you remember when she did not want to do her drawing room up again? She's done up the entire house."

But the ladies grew silent, for Mme de Chezelles was entering the room, followed by a band of young men. She was going into ecstasies and marking her approval with a succession of little exclamations.

"Oh, it's delicious, exquisite! What taste!" And she shouted back to her followers:

"Didn't I say so? There's nothing equal to these old places when one takes them in hand. They become dazzling! It's quite in the grand seventeenth-century style. Well, *now* she can receive."

The two old ladies had again sat down and with lowered tones began talking about the marriage, which was causing astonishment to a good many people. Estelle had just passed by them. She was in a pink silk gown and was as pale, flat, silent and virginal as ever. She had accepted Daguenet very quietly and now evinced neither joy nor sadness, for she was still as cold and white as on those winter evenings when she used to put logs on the fire.

This whole fete given in her honor, these lights and flowers and tunes, left her quite unmoved.

"An adventurer," Mme du Joncquoy was saying. "For my part, I've never seen him."

"Take care, here he is," whispered Mme Chantereau.

Daguenet, who had caught sight of Mme Hugon and her sons, had eagerly offered her his arm. He laughed and was effusively affectionate toward her, as though she had had a hand in his sudden good fortune.

"Thank you," she said, sitting down near the fireplace. "You see, it's my old corner."

"You know him?" queried Mme du Joncquoy, when Daguenet had gone.

"Certainly I do—a charming young man. Georges is very fond of him. Oh, they're a most respected family."

And the good lady defended him against the mute hostility which was apparent to her. His father, held in high esteem by Louis Philippe, had been a *préfet* up to the time of his death. The son had been a little dissipated, perhaps; they said he was ruined, but in any case, one of his uncles, who was a great landowner, was bound to leave him his fortune. The ladies, however, shook their heads, while Mme Hugon, herself somewhat embarrassed, kept harking back to the extreme respectability of his family. She was very much fatigued and complained of her feet. For some months she had been occupying her house in the Rue Richelieu, having, as she said, a whole lot of things on hand. A look of sorrow overshadowed her smiling, motherly face.

"Never mind," Mme Chantereau concluded. "Estelle could have aimed at something much better."

There was a flourish. A quadrille was about to begin, and the crowd flowed back to the sides of the drawing room in order to leave the floor clear. Bright dresses flitted by and mingled together amid the dark evening coats, while the intense light set jewels flashing and white plumes quivering and lilacs and roses gleaming and flowering amid the sea of many heads. It was already very warm, and a penetrating perfume was exhaled from light tulles and crumpled silks and satins, from which bare shoulders glimmered white, while the orchestra played its lively airs. Through open doors ranges of seated ladies were visible in the background of adjoining rooms; they flashed a discreet smile; their eyes glowed, and they made pretty mouths as the breath of their fans caressed their faces. And guests still kept arriving, and a footman announced their names while gentlemen advanced slowly amid the surrounding groups, striving to find places for ladies, who hung with difficulty on their arms, and stretching forward in quest of some far-off vacant armchair. The house kept filling, and crinolined skirts got jammed together with a little rustling sound. There were corners where an amalgam of laces, bunches and puffs would completely bar the way, while all the other ladies stood waiting, politely resigned and imperturbably graceful, as became people who were made to take part in these dazzling crushes. Meanwhile across the garden couples, who had been glad to escape from the close air of the great drawing room, were wandering away under the roseate gleam of the Venetian lamps,

and shadowy dresses kept fitting along the edge of the lawn, as though in rhythmic time to the music of the quadrille, which sounded sweet and distant behind the trees.

Steiner had just met with Foucarmont and La Faloise, who were drinking a glass of champagne in front of the buffet.

"It's beastly smart," said La Faloise as he took a survey of the purple tent, which was supported by gilded lances. "You might fancy yourself at the Gingerbread Fair. That's it—the Gingerbread Fair!"

In these days he continually affected a bantering tone, posing as the young man who has abused every mortal thing and now finds nothing worth taking seriously.

"How surprised poor Vandeuves would be if he were to come back," murmured Foucarmont. "You remember how he simply nearly died of boredom in front of the fire in there. Egad, it was no laughing matter."

"Vandeuves—oh, let him be. He's a gone coon!" La Faloise disdainfully rejoined. "He jolly well choused himself, he did, if he thought he could make us sit up with his roast-meat story! Not a soul mentions it now. Blotted out, done for, buried—that's what's the matter with Vandeuves! Here's to the next man!"

Then as Steiner shook hands with him:

"You know Nana's just arrived. Oh, my boys, it was a state entry. It was too brilliant for anything! First of all she kissed the countess. Then when the children came up she gave them her blessing and said to Daguenet, 'Listen, Paul, if you go running after the girls you'll have to answer for it to me.' What, d'you mean to say you didn't see that? Oh, it *was* smart. A success, if you like!"

The other two listened to him, openmouthed, and at last burst out laughing. He was enchanted and thought himself in his best vein.

"You thought it had really happened, eh? Confound it, since Nana's made the match! Anyway, she's one of the family."

The young Hugons were passing, and Philippe silenced him. And with that they chatted about the marriage from the male point of view. Georges was vexed with La Faloise for telling an anecdote. Certainly Nana had fubbed off on Muffat one of her old flames as son-in-law; only it was not true that she had been to bed with Daguenet as lately as yesterday. Foucarmont made bold to shrug his shoulders. Could anyone ever tell when Nana was in bed with anyone? But Georges grew excited and answered with an "I can tell, sir!" which set them all laughing. In a word, as Steiner put it, it was all a very funny kettle of fish!

The buffet was gradually invaded by the crowd, and, still keeping together, they vacated their positions there. La Faloise stared brazenly at the women as though he believed himself to be Mabile. At the end of a garden walk the little band was surprised to find M. Venot busily conferring with Daguenet, and with that they indulged in some facile pleasantries which made them very merry. He was confessing him, giving him advice about the bridal night! Presently they returned in front of one of the drawing-room doors, within

which a polka was sending the couples whirling to and fro till they seemed to leave a wake behind them among the crowd of men who remained standing about. In the slight puffs of air which came from outside the tapers flared up brilliantly, and when a dress floated by in time to the rat-tat of the measure, a little gust of wind cooled the sparkling heat which streamed down from the lusters.

"Egad, they're not cold in there!" muttered La Faloise.

They blinked after emerging from the mysterious shadows of the garden. Then they pointed out to one another the Marquis de Chouard where he stood apart, his tall figure towering over the bare shoulders which surrounded him. His face was pale and very stern, and beneath its crown of scant white hair it wore an expression of lofty dignity. Scandalized by Count Muffat's conduct, he had publicly broken off all intercourse with him and was by way of never again setting foot in the house. If he had consented to put in an appearance that evening it was because his granddaughter had begged him to. But he disapproved of her marriage and had inveighed indignantly against the way in which the government classes were being disorganized by the shameful compromises engendered by modern debauchery.

"Ah, it's the end of all things," Mme du Joncquoy whispered in Mme Chantereau's ear as she sat near the fireplace. "That bad woman has bewitched the unfortunate man. And to think we once knew him such a true believer, such a noblehearted gentleman!"

"It appears he is ruining himself," continued Mme Chantereau. "My husband has had a bill of his in his hands. At present he's living in that house in the Avenue de Villiers; all Paris is talking about it. Good heavens! I don't make excuses for Sabine, but you must admit that he gives her infinite cause of complaint, and, dear me, if she throws money out of the window, too——"

"She does not only throw money," interrupted the other. "In fact, between them, there's no knowing where they'll stop; they'll end in the mire, my dear."

But just then a soft voice interrupted them. It was M. Venot, and he had come and seated himself behind them, as though anxious to disappear from view. Bending forward, he murmured:

"Why despair? God manifests Himself when all seems lost."

He was assisting peacefully at the downfall of the house which he erewhile governed. Since his stay at Les Fondettes he had been allowing the madness to increase, for he was very clearly aware of his own powerlessness. He had, indeed, accepted the whole position—the count's wild passion for Nana, Fauchery's presence, even Estelle's marriage with Daguenet. What did these things matter? He even became more supple and mysterious, for he nursed a hope of being able to gain the same mastery over the young as over the disunited couple, and he knew that great disorders lead to great conversions. Providence would have its opportunity.

"Our friend," he continued in a low voice, "is always animated by the best religious sentiments. He has given me the sweetest proofs of this."

"Well," said Mme du Joncquoy, "he ought first to have made it up with his wife."

"Doubtless. At this moment I have hopes that the reconciliation will be shortly effected."

Whereupon the two old ladies questioned him.

But he grew very humble again. "Heaven," he said, "must be left to act." His whole desire in bringing the count and the countess together again was to avoid a public scandal, for religion tolerated many faults when the proprieties were respected.

"In fact," resumed Mme du Joncquoy, "you ought to have prevented this union with an adventurer."

The little old gentleman assumed an expression of profound astonishment.

"You deceive yourself. Monsieur Daguenet is a young man of the greatest merit. I am acquainted with his thoughts; he is anxious to live down the errors of his youth. Estelle will bring him back to the path of virtue, be sure of that."

"Oh, Estelle!" Mme Chantereau murmured disdainfully. "I believe the dear young thing to be incapable of willing anything; she is so insignificant!"

This opinion caused M. Venot to smile. However, he went into no explanations about the young bride and, shutting his eyes, as though to avoid seeming to take any further interest in the matter, he once more lost himself in his corner behind the petticoats. Mme Hugon, though weary and absent-minded, had caught some phrases of the conversation, and she now intervened and summed up in her tolerant way by remarking to the Marquis de Chouard, who just then bowed to her:

"These ladies are too severe. Existence is so bitter for every one of us! Ought we not to forgive others much, my friend, if we wish to merit forgiveness ourselves?"

For some seconds the marquis appeared embarrassed, for he was afraid of allusions. But the good lady wore so sad a smile that he recovered almost at once and remarked:

"No, there is no forgiveness for certain faults. It is by reason of this kind of accommodating spirit that a society sinks into the abyss of ruin."

The ball had grown still more animated. A fresh quadrille was imparting a slight swaying motion to the drawing-room floor, as though the old dwelling had been shaken by the impulse of the dance. Now and again amid the wan confusion of heads a woman's face with shining eyes and parted lips stood sharply out as it was whirled away by the dance, the light of the lusters gleaming on the white skin. Mme du Joncquoy declared that the present proceedings were senseless. It was madness to crowd five hundred people into a room which would scarcely contain two hundred. In fact, why not sign the wedding contract on the Place du Carrousel? This was the outcome of the new code of manners, said Mme Chantereau. In old times these solemnities took place in the bosom of the family, but today one must have a mob of people; the whole street must be allowed to enter quite freely, and there must be a great crush, or else the evening seems a chilly affair. People now advertised their luxury and introduced the mere foam on the wave of Parisian society into their houses, and accordingly it was only too natural if illicit proceedings

such as they had been discussing afterward polluted the hearth. The ladies complained that they could not recognize more than fifty people. Where did all this crowd spring from? Young girls with low necks were making a great display of their shoulders. A woman had a golden dagger stuck in her chignon, while a bodice thickly embroidered with jet beads clothed her in what looked like a coat of mail. People's eyes kept following another lady smilingly, so singularly marked were her clinging skirts. All the luxuriant splendor of the departing winter was there—the overtolerant world of pleasure, the scratch gathering a hostess can get together after a first introduction, the sort of society, in fact, in which great names and great shames jostle together in the same fierce quest of enjoyment. The heat was increasing, and amid the overcrowded rooms the quadrille unrolled the cadenced symmetry of its figures.

"Very smart—the countess!" La Faloise continued at the garden door. "She's ten years younger than her daughter. By the by, Foucarmont, you must decide on a point. Vandeuvres once bet that she had no thighs."

This affectation of cynicism bored the other gentlemen, and Foucarmont contented himself by saying:

"Ask your cousin, dear boy. Here he is."

"Jove, it's a happy thought!" cried La Faloise. "I bet ten louis she has thighs."

Fauchery did indeed come up. As became a constant inmate of the house, he had gone round by the dining room in order to avoid the crowded doors. Rose had taken him up again at the beginning of the winter, and he was now dividing himself between the singer and the countess, but he was extremely fatigued and did not know how to get rid of one of them. Sabine flattered his vanity, but Rose amused him more than she. Besides, the passion Rose felt was a real one: her tenderness for him was marked by a conjugal fidelity which drove Mignon to despair.

"Listen, we want some information," said La Faloise as he squeezed his cousin's arm. "You see that lady in white silk?"

Ever since his inheritance had given him a kind of insolent dash of manner he had affected to chaff Fauchery, for he had an old grudge to satisfy and wanted to be revenged for much bygone raillery, dating from the days when he was just fresh from his native province.

"Yes, that lady with the lace."

The journalist stood on tiptoe, for as yet he did not understand.

"The countess?" he said at last.

"Exactly, my good friend. I've bet ten louis—now, has she thighs?"

And he fell a-laughing, for he was delighted to have succeeded in snubbing a fellow who had once come heavily down on him for asking whether the countess slept with anyone. But Fauchery, without showing the very slightest astonishment, looked fixedly at him.

"Get along, you idiot!" he said finally as he shrugged his shoulders.

Then he shook hands with the other gentlemen, while La Faloise, in his discomfiture, felt rather uncertain whether he had said something funny. The men chatted. Since the races the banker and Foucarmont had formed part of the

set in the Avenue de Villiers. Nana was going on much better, and every evening the count came and asked how she did. Meanwhile Fauchery, though he listened, seemed preoccupied, for during a quarrel that morning Rose had roundly confessed to the sending of the letter. Oh yes, he might present himself at his great lady's house; he would be well received! After long hesitation he had come despite everything—out of sheer courage. But La Faloise's imbecile pleasantries had upset him in spite of his apparent tranquillity.

"What's the matter?" asked Philippe. "You seem in trouble."

"I do? Not at all. I've been working: that's why I came so late."

Then coldly, in one of those heroic moods which, although unnoticed, are wont to solve the vulgar tragedies of existence:

"All the same, I haven't made my bow to our hosts. One must be civil."

He even ventured on a joke, for he turned to La Faloise and said:

"Eh, you idiot?"

And with that he pushed his way through the crowd. The valet's full voice was no longer shouting out names, but close to the door the count and countess were still talking, for they were detained by ladies coming in. At length he joined them, while the gentlemen who were still on the garden steps stood on tiptoe so as to watch the scene. Nana, they thought, must have been chattering.

"The count hasn't noticed him," muttered Georges. "Look out! He's turning round; there, it's done!"

The band had again taken up the waltz in the *Blonde Venus*. Fauchery had begun by bowing to the countess, who was still smiling in ecstatic serenity. After which he had stood motionless a moment, waiting very calmly behind the count's back. That evening the count's deportment was one of lofty gravity: he held his head high, as became the official and the great dignitary. And when at last he lowered his gaze in the direction of the journalist he seemed still further to emphasize the majesty of his attitude. For some seconds the two men looked at one another. It was Fauchery who first stretched out his hand. Muffat gave him his. Their hands remained clasped, and the Countess Sabine with downcast eyes stood smiling before them, while the waltz continually beat out its mocking, vagabond rhythm.

"But the thing's going on wheels!" said Steiner.

"Are their hands glued together?" asked Foucarmont, surprised at this prolonged clasp. A memory he could not forget brought a faint glow to Fauchery's pale cheeks, and in his mind's eye he saw the property room bathed in greenish twilight and filled with dusty bric-a-brac. And Muffat was there, eggcup in hand, making a clever use of his suspicions. At this moment Muffat was no longer suspicious, and the last vestige of his dignity was crumbling in ruin. Fauchery's fears were assuaged, and when he saw the frank gaiety of the countess he was seized with a desire to laugh. The thing struck him as comic.

"Aha, here she is at last!" cried La Faloise, who did not abandon a jest when he thought it a good one. "D'you see Nana coming in over there?"

"Hold your tongue, do, you idiot!" muttered Philippe.

"But I tell you, it is Nana! They're playing her waltz for her, by Jove! She's making her entry. And she takes part in the reconciliation, the devil she does!"

What? You don't see her? She's squeezing all three of 'em to her heart—my cousin Fauchery, my lady cousin and her husband, and she's calling 'em her dear kitties. Oh, those family scenes give me a turn!"

Estelle had come up, and Fauchery complimented her while she stood stiffly up in her rose-colored dress, gazing at him with the astonished look of a silent child and constantly glancing aside at her father and mother. Daguenet, too, exchanged a hearty shake of the hand with the journalist. Together they made up a smiling group, while M. Venot came gliding in behind them. He gloated over them with a beatified expression and seemed to envelop them in his pious sweetness, for he rejoiced in these last instances of self-abandonment which were preparing the means of grace.

But the waltz still beat out its swinging, laughing, voluptuous measure; it was like a shrill continuation of the life of pleasure which was beating against the old house like a rising tide. The band blew louder trills from their little flutes; their violins sent forth more swooning notes. Beneath the Genoa velvet hangings, the gilding and the paintings, the lusters exhaled a living heat and a great glow of sunlight, while the crowd of guests, multiplied in the surrounding mirrors, seemed to grow and increase as the murmur of many voices rose ever louder. The couples who whirled round the drawing room, arm about waist, amid the smiles of the seated ladies, still further accentuated the quaking of the floors. In the garden a dull, fiery glow fell from the Venetian lanterns and threw a distant reflection of flame over the dark shadows moving in search of a breath of air about the walks at its farther end. And this trembling of walls and this red glow of light seemed to betoken a great ultimate conflagration in which the fabric of an ancient honor was cracking and burning on every side. The shy early beginnings of gaiety, of which Fauchery one April evening had heard the vocal expression in the sound of breaking glass, had little by little grown bolder, wilder, till they had burst forth in this festival. Now the rift was growing; it was crannying the house and announcing approaching downfall. Among drunkards in the slums it is black misery, an empty cupboard, which put an end to ruined families; it is the madness of drink which empties the wretched beds. Here the waltz tune was sounding the knell of an old race amid the suddenly ignited ruins of accumulated wealth, while Nana, although unseen, stretched her lithe limbs above the dancers' heads and sent corruption through their caste, drenching the hot air with the ferment of her exhalations and the vagabond lilt of the music.

On the evening after the celebration of the church marriage Count Muffat made his appearance in his wife's bedroom, where he had not entered for the last two years. At first, in her great surprise, the countess drew back from him. But she was still smiling the intoxicated smile which she now always wore. He began stammering in extreme embarrassment; whereupon she gave him a short moral lecture. However, neither of them risked a decisive explanation. It was religion, they pretended, which required this process of mutual forgiveness, and they agreed by a tacit understanding to retain their freedom. Before going to bed, seeing that the countess still appeared to hesitate, they had a business conversation, and the count was the first to speak of

selling the Bordes. She consented at once. They both stood in great want of money, and they would share and share alike. This completed the reconciliation, and Muffat, remorseful though he was, felt veritably relieved.

That very day, as Nana was dozing toward two in the afternoon, Zoé made so bold as to knock at her bedroom door. The curtains were drawn to, and a hot breath of wind kept blowing through a window into the fresh twilight stillness within. During these last days the young woman had been getting up and about again, but she was still somewhat weak. She opened her eyes and asked:

"Who is it?"

Zoé was about to reply, but Daguenet pushed by her and announced himself in person. Nana forthwith propped herself up on her pillow and, dismissing the lady's maid:

"What! Is that you?" she cried. "On the day of your marriage? What can be the matter?"

Taken aback by the darkness, he stood still in the middle of the room. However, he grew used to it and came forward at last. He was in evening dress and wore a white cravat and gloves.

"Yes, to be sure, it's me!" he said. "You don't remember?"

No, she remembered nothing, and in his chaffing way he had to offer himself frankly to her.

"Come now, here's your commission. I've brought you the handsel of my innocence!"

And with that, as he was now by the bedside, she caught him in her bare arms and shook with merry laughter and almost cried, she thought it so pretty of him.

"Oh, that Mimi, how funny he is! He's thought of it after all! And to think I didn't remember it any longer! So you've slipped off; you're just out of church. Yes, certainly, you've got a scent of incense about you. But kiss me, kiss me! Oh, harder than that, Mimi dear! Bah! Perhaps it's for the last time."

In the dim room, where a vague odor of ether still lingered, their tender laughter died away suddenly. The heavy, warm breeze swelled the window curtains, and children's voices were audible in the avenue without. Then the lateness of the hour tore them asunder and set them joking again. Daguenet took his departure with his wife directly after the breakfast.

CHAPTER XIII

TOWARD the end of September Count Muffat, who was to dine at Nana's that evening, came at nightfall to inform her of a summons to the Tuileries. The lamps in the house had not been lit yet, and the servants were laughing uproariously in the kitchen regions as he softly mounted the stairs, where the tall windows gleamed in warm shadow. The door of the drawing room upstairs opened noiselessly. A faint pink glow was dying out on the ceiling of the room, and the red hangings, the deep divans, the lacquered furniture, with

their medley of embroidered fabrics and bronzes and china, were already sleeping under a slowly creeping flood of shadows, which drowned nooks and corners and blotted out the gleam of ivory and the glint of gold. And there in the darkness, on the white surface of a wide, outspread petticoat, which alone remained clearly visible, he saw Nana lying stretched in the arms of Georges. Denial in any shape or form was impossible. He gave a choking cry and stood gaping at them.

Nana had bounded up, and now she pushed him into the bedroom in order to give the lad time to escape.

"Come in," she murmured with reeling senses, "I'll explain."

She was exasperated at being thus surprised. Never before had she given way like this in her own house, in her own drawing room, when the doors were open. It was a long story: Georges and she had had a disagreement; he had been mad with jealousy of Philippe, and he had sobbed so bitterly on her bosom that she had yielded to him, not knowing how else to calm him and really very full of pity for him at heart. And on this solitary occasion, when she had been stupid enough to forget herself thus with a little rascal who could not even now bring her bouquets of violets, so short did his mother keep him—on this solitary occasion the count turned up and came straight down on them. 'Gad, she had very bad luck! That was what one got if one was a good-natured wench!

Meanwhile in the bedroom, into which she had pushed Muffat, the darkness was complete. Whereupon after some groping she rang furiously and asked for a lamp. It was Julien's fault too! If there had been a lamp in the drawing room the whole affair would not have happened. It was the stupid nightfall which had got the better of her heart.

"I beseech you to be reasonable, my pet," she said when Zoé had brought in the lights.

The count, with his hands on his knees, was sitting gazing at the floor. He was stupefied by what he had just seen. He did not cry out in anger. He only trembled, as though overtaken by some horror which was freezing him. This dumb misery touched the young woman, and she tried to comfort him.

"Well, yes, I've done wrong. It's very bad what I did. You see I'm sorry for my fault. It makes me grieve very much because it annoys you. Come now, be nice, too, and forgive me."

She had crouched down at his feet and was striving to catch his eye with a look of tender submission. She was fain to know whether he was very vexed with her. Presently, as he gave a long sigh and seemed to recover himself, she grew more coaxing and with grave kindness of manner added a final reason: "You see, dearie, you must try and understand how it is: I can't refuse it to my poor friends."

The count consented to give way and only insisted that Georges should be dismissed once for all. But all his illusions had vanished, and he no longer believed in her sworn fidelity. Next day Nana would deceive him anew, and he only remained her miserable possessor in obedience to a cowardly necessity and to terror at the thought of living without her.

This was the epoch in her existence when Nana flared upon Paris with redoubled splendor. She loomed larger than heretofore on the horizon of vice and swayed the town with her impudently flaunted splendor and that contempt of money which made her openly squander fortunes. Her house had become a sort of glowing smithy, where her continual desires were the flames and the slightest breath from her lips changed gold into fine ashes, which the wind hourly swept away. Never had eye beheld such a rage of expenditure. The great house seemed to have been built over a gulf in which men—their worldly possessions, their fortunes, their very names—were swallowed up without leaving even a handful of dust behind them. This courtesan, who had the tastes of a parrot and gobbled up radishes and burnt almonds and pecked at the meat upon her plate, had monthly table bills amounting to five thousand francs. The wildest waste went on in the kitchen: the place, metaphorically speaking, was one great river which stove in cask upon cask of wine and swept great bills with it, swollen by three or four successive manipulators. Victorine and François reigned supreme in the kitchen, whither they invited friends. In addition to these there was quite a little tribe of cousins, who were cockered up in their homes with cold meats and strong soup. Julien made the tradespeople give him commissions, and the glaziers never put up a pane of glass at a cost of a franc and a half but he had a franc put down to himself. Charles devoured the horses' oats and doubled the amount of their provender, reselling at the back door what came in at the carriage gate, while amid the general pillage, the sack of the town after the storm, Zoé, by dint of cleverness, succeeded in saving appearances and covering the thefts of all in order the better to slur over and make good her own. But the household waste was worse than the household dishonesty. Yesterday's food was thrown into the gutter, and the collection of provisions in the house was such that the servants grew disgusted with it. The glass was all sticky with sugar, and the gas burners flared and flared till the rooms seemed ready to explode. Then, too, there were instances of negligence and mischief and sheer accident—of everything, in fact, which can hasten the ruin of a house devoured by so many mouths. Upstairs in Madame's quarters destruction raged more fiercely still. Dresses, which cost ten thousand francs and had been twice worn, were sold by Zoé; jewels vanished as though they had crumbled deep down in their drawers; stupid purchases were made; every novelty of the day was brought and left to lie forgotten in some corner the morning after or swept up by ragpickers in the street. She could not see any very expensive object without wanting to possess it, and so she constantly surrounded herself with the wrecks of bouquets and costly knickknacks and was the happier the more her passing fancy cost. Nothing remained intact in her hands; she broke everything, and this object withered, and that grew dirty in the clasp of her lithe white fingers. A perfect heap of nameless debris, of twisted shreds and muddy rags, followed her and marked her passage. Then amid this utter squandering of pocket money cropped up a question about the big bills and their settlement. Twenty thousand francs were due to the modiste, thirty thousand to the linen draper, twelve thousand to the bootmaker. Her stable devoured fifty thousand for

her, and in six months she ran up a bill of a hundred and twenty thousand francs at her ladies' tailor. Though she had not enlarged her scheme of expenditure, which Labordette reckoned at four hundred thousand francs on an average, she ran up that same year to a million. She was herself stupefied by the amount and was unable to tell whither such a sum could have gone. Heaps upon heaps of men, barrowfuls of gold, failed to stop up the hole, which, amid this ruinous luxury, continually gaped under the floor of her house.

Meanwhile Nana had cherished her latest caprice. Once more exercised by the notion that her room needed redoing, she fancied she had hit on something at last. The room should be done in velvet of the color of tea roses, with silver buttons and golden cords, tassels and fringes, and the hangings should be caught up to the ceiling after the manner of a tent. This arrangement ought to be both rich and tender, she thought, and would form a splendid background to her blonde vermeil-tinted skin. However, the bedroom was only designed to serve as a setting to the bed, which was to be a dazzling affair, a prodigy. Nana meditated a bed such as had never before existed; it was to be a throne, an altar, whither Paris was to come in order to adore her sovereign nudity. It was to be all in gold and silver beaten work—it should suggest a great piece of jewelry with its golden roses climbing on a trelliswork of silver. On the headboard a band of Loves should peep forth laughing from amid the flowers, as though they were watching the voluptuous dalliance within the shadow of the bed curtains. Nana had applied to Labordette who had brought two goldsmiths to see her. They were already busy with the designs. The bed would cost fifty thousand francs, and Muffat was to give it her as a New Year's present.

What most astonished the young woman was that she was endlessly short of money amid a river of gold, the tide of which almost enveloped her. On certain days she was at her wit's end for want of ridiculously small sums—sums of only a few louis. She was driven to borrow from Zoé, or she scraped up cash as well as she could on her own account. But before resignedly adopting extreme measures she tried her friends and in a joking sort of way got the men to give her all they had about them, even down to their coppers. For the last three months she had been emptying Philippe's pockets especially, and now on days of passionate enjoyment he never came away but he left his purse behind him. Soon she grew bolder and asked him for loans of two hundred francs, three hundred francs—never more than that—wherewith to pay the interest of bills or to stave off outrageous debts. And Philippe, who in July had been appointed paymaster to his regiment, would bring the money the day after, apologizing at the same time for not being rich, seeing that good Mamma Hugon now treated her sons with singular financial severity. At the close of three months these little oft-renewed loans mounted up to a sum of ten thousand francs. The captain still laughed his hearty-sounding laugh, but he was growing visibly thinner, and sometimes he seemed absent-minded, and a shade of suffering would pass over his face. But one look from Nana's eyes would transfigure him in a sort of sensual ecstasy. She had a very coaxing way with him and would intoxicate him with furtive kisses and yield

herself to him in sudden fits of self-abandonment, which tied him to her apron strings the moment he was able to escape from his military duties.

One evening, Nana having announced that her name, too, was Thérèse and that her fete day was the fifteenth of October, the gentlemen all sent her presents. Captain Philippe brought his himself; it was an old comfit dish in Dresden china, and it had a gold mount. He found her alone in her dressing room. She had just emerged from the bath, had nothing on save a great red-and-white flannel bathing wrap and was very busy examining her presents, which were ranged on a table. She had already broken a rock-crystal flask in her attempts to unstopper it.

"Oh, you're too nice!" she said. "What is it? Let's have a peep! What a baby you are to spend your pennies in little fakements like that!"

She scolded him, seeing that he was not rich, but at heart she was delighted to see him spending his whole substance for her. Indeed, this was the only proof of love which had power to touch her. Meanwhile she was fiddling away at the comfit dish, opening it and shutting it in her desire to see how it was made.

"Take care," he murmured, "it's brittle."

But she shrugged her shoulders. Did he think her as clumsy as a street porter? And all of a sudden the hinge came off between her fingers and the lid fell and was broken. She was stupefied and remained gazing at the fragments as she cried:

"Oh, it's smashed!"

Then she burst out laughing. The fragments lying on the floor tickled her fancy. Her merriment was of the nervous kind, the stupid, spiteful laughter of a child who delights in destruction. Philippe had a little fit of disgust, for the wretched girl did not know what anguish this curio had cost him. Seeing him thoroughly upset, she tried to contain herself.

"Gracious me, it isn't my fault! It was cracked; those old things barely hold together. Besides, it was the cover! Didn't you see the bound it gave?"

And she once more burst into uproarious mirth.

But though he made an effort to the contrary, tears appeared in the young man's eyes, and with that she flung her arms tenderly round his neck.

"How silly you are! You know I love you all the same. If one never broke anything the tradesmen would never sell anything. All that sort of thing's made to be broken. Now look at this fan; it's only held together with glue!"

She had snatched up a fan and was dragging at the blades so that the silk was torn in two. This seemed to excite her, and in order to show that she scorned the other presents, the moment she had ruined his she treated herself to a general massacre, rapping each successive object and proving clearly that not one was solid in that she had broken them all. There was a lurid glow in her vacant eyes, and her lips, slightly drawn back, displayed her white teeth. Soon, when everything was in fragments, she laughed cheerily again and with flushed cheeks beat on the table with the flat of her hands, lisping like a naughty little girl:

"All over! Got no more! Got no more!"

Then Philippe was overcome by the same mad excitement, and, pushing her

down, he merrily kissed her bosom. She abandoned herself to him and clung to his shoulders with such gleeful energy that she could not remember having enjoyed herself so much for an age past. Without letting go of him she said caressingly:

"I say, dearie, you ought certainly to bring me ten louis tomorrow. It's a bore, but there's the baker's bill worrying me awfully."

He had grown pale. Then imprinting a final kiss on her forehead, he said simply:

"I'll try."

Silence reigned. She was dressing, and he stood pressing his forehead against the windowpanes. A minute passed, and he returned to her and deliberately continued:

"Nana, you ought to marry me."

This notion straightway so tickled the young woman that she was unable to finish tying on her petticoats.

"My poor pet, you're ill! D'you offer me your hand because I ask you for ten louis? No, never! I'm too fond of you. Good gracious, what a silly question!"

And as Zoé entered in order to put her boots on, they ceased talking of the matter. The lady's maid at once espied the presents lying broken in pieces on the table. She asked if she should put these things away, and, Madame having bidden her get rid of them, she carried the whole collection off in the folds of her dress. In the kitchen a sorting-out process began, and Madame's debris were shared among the servants.

That day Georges had slipped into the house despite Nana's orders to the contrary. François had certainly seen him pass, but the servants had now got to laugh among themselves at their good lady's embarrassing situations. He had just slipped as far as the little drawing room when his brother's voice stopped him, and, as one powerless to tear himself from the door, he overheard everything that went on within, the kisses, the offer of marriage. A feeling of horror froze him, and he went away in a state bordering on imbecility, feeling as though there were a great void in his brain. It was only in his own room above his mother's flat in the Rue Richelieu that his heart broke in a storm of furious sobs. This time there could be no doubt about the state of things; a horrible picture of Nana in Philippe's arms kept rising before his mind's eye. It struck him in the light of an incest. When he fancied himself calm again the remembrance of it all would return, and in fresh access of raging jealousy he would throw himself on the bed, biting the coverlet, shouting infamous accusations which maddened him the more. Thus the day passed. In order to stay shut up in his room he spoke of having a sick headache. But the night proved more terrible still; a murder fever shook him amid continual nightmares. Had his brother lived in the house, he would have gone and killed him with the stab of a knife. When day returned he tried to reason things out. It was he who ought to die, and he determined to throw himself out of the window when an omnibus was passing. Nevertheless, he went out toward ten o'clock and traversed Paris, wandered up and down on the bridges and at the

last moment felt an unconquerable desire to see Nana once more. With one word, perhaps, she would save him. And three o'clock was striking when he entered the house in the Avenue de Villiers.

Toward noon a frightful piece of news had simply crushed Mme Hugon. Philippe had been in prison since the evening of the previous day, accused of having stolen twelve thousand francs from the chest of his regiment. For the last three months he had been withdrawing small sums therefrom in the hope of being able to repay them, while he had covered the deficit with false money. Thanks to the negligence of the administrative committee, this fraud had been constantly successful. The old lady, humbled utterly by her child's crime, had at once cried out in anger against Nana. She knew Philippe's connection with her, and her melancholy had been the result of this miserable state of things which kept her in Paris in constant dread of some final catastrophe. But she had never looked forward to such shame as this, and now she blamed herself for refusing him money, as though such refusal had made her accessory to his act. She sank down on an armchair; her legs were seized with paralysis, and she felt herself to be useless, incapable of action and destined to stay where she was till she died. But the sudden thought of Georges comforted her. Georges was still left her; he would be able to act, perhaps to save them. Thereupon, without seeking aid of anyone else—for she wished to keep these matters shrouded in the bosom of her family—she dragged herself up to the next story, her mind possessed by the idea that she still had someone to love about her. But upstairs she found an empty room. The porter told her that M. Georges had gone out at an early hour. The room was haunted by the ghost of yet another calamity; the bed with its gnawed bedclothes bore witness to someone's anguish, and a chair which lay amid a heap of clothes on the ground looked like something dead. Georges must be at that woman's house, and so with dry eyes and feet that had regained their strength Mme Hugon went downstairs. She wanted her sons; she was starting to reclaim them.

Since morning Nana had been much worried. First of all it was the baker, who at nine o'clock had turned up, bill in hand. It was a wretched story. He had supplied her with bread to the amount of a hundred and thirty-three francs, and despite her royal housekeeping she could not pay it. In his irritation at being put off he had presented himself a score of times since the day he had refused further credit, and the servants were now espousing his cause. François kept saying that Madame would never pay him unless he made a fine scene; Charles talked of going upstairs, too, in order to get an old unpaid straw bill settled, while Victorine advised them to wait till some gentleman was with her, when they would get the money out of her by suddenly asking for it in the middle of conversation. The kitchen was in a savage mood: the tradesmen were all kept posted in the course events were taking, and there were gossiping consultations, lasting three or four hours on a stretch, during which Madame was stripped, plucked and talked over with the wrathful eagerness peculiar to an idle, overprosperous servants' hall. Julien, the house steward, alone pretended to defend his mistress. She was quite the thing, whatever they

might say! And when the others accused him of sleeping with her he laughed fatuously, thereby driving the cook to distraction, for she would have liked to be a man in order to "spit on such women's backsides," so utterly would they have disgusted her. François, without informing Madame of it, had wickedly posted the baker in the hall, and when she came downstairs at lunch time she found herself face to face with him. Taking the bill, she told him to return toward three o'clock, whereupon, with many foul expressions, he departed, vowing that he would have things properly settled and get his money by hook or by crook.

Nana made a very bad lunch, for the scene had annoyed her. Next time the man would have to be definitely got rid of. A dozen times she had put his money aside for him, but it had as constantly melted away, sometimes in the purchase of flowers, at others in the shape of a subscription got up for the benefit of an old gendarme. Besides, she was counting on Philippe and was astonished not to see him make his appearance with his two hundred francs. It was regular bad luck, seeing that the day before yesterday she had again given Satin an outfit, a perfect trousseau this time, some twelve hundred francs' worth of dresses and linen, and now she had not a louis remaining.

Toward two o'clock, when Nana was beginning to be anxious, Labordette presented himself. He brought with him the designs for the bed, and this caused a diversion, a joyful interlude which made the young woman forget all her troubles. She clapped her hands and danced about. After which, her heart bursting with curiosity, she leaned over a table in the drawing room and examined the designs, which Labordette proceeded to explain to her.

"You see," he said, "this is the body of the bed. In the middle here there's a bunch of roses in full bloom, and then comes a garland of buds and flowers. The leaves are to be in yellow and the roses in red-gold. And here's the grand design for the bed's head; Cupids dancing in a ring on a silver trelliswork."

But Nana interrupted him, for she was beside herself with ecstasy.

"Oh, how funny that little one is, that one in the corner, with his behind in the air! Isn't he now? And what a sly laugh! They've all got such dirty, wicked eyes! You know, dear boy, I shall never dare play any silly tricks before *them!*"

Her pride was flattered beyond measure. The goldsmiths had declared that no queen anywhere slept in such a bed. However, a difficulty presented itself. Labordette showed her two designs for the footboard, one of which reproduced the pattern on the sides, while the other, a subject by itself, represented Night wrapped in her veil and discovered by a faun in all her splendid nudity. He added that if she chose this last subject the goldsmiths intended making Night in her own likeness. This idea, the taste of which was rather risky, made her grow white with pleasure, and she pictured herself as a silver statuette, symbolic of the warm, voluptuous delights of darkness.

"Of course you will only sit for the head and shoulders," said Labordette. She looked quietly at him.

"Why? The moment a work of art's in question I don't mind the sculptor that takes my likeness a blooming bit!"

Of course it must be understood that she was choosing the subject. But at this he interposed.

"Wait a moment; it's six thousand francs extra."

"It's all the same to me, by Jove!" she cried, bursting into a laugh. "Hasn't my little rough got the rhino?"

Nowadays among her intimates she always spoke thus of Count Muffat, and the gentlemen had ceased to inquire after him otherwise.

"Did you see your little rough last night?" they used to say.

"Dear me, I expected to find the little rough here!"

It was a simple familiarity enough, which, nevertheless, she did not as yet venture on in his presence.

Labordette began rolling up the designs as he gave the final explanations. The goldsmiths, he said, were undertaking to deliver the bed in two months' time, toward the twenty-fifth of December, and next week a sculptor would come to make a model for the Night. As she accompanied him to the door Nana remembered the baker and briskly inquired:

"By the by, you wouldn't be having ten louis about you?"

Labordette made it a solemn rule, which stood him in good stead, never to lend women money. He used always to make the same reply.

"No, my girl, I'm short. But would you like me to go to your little rough?"

She refused; it was useless. Two days before she had succeeded in getting five thousand francs out of the count. However, she soon regretted her discreet conduct, for the moment Labordette had gone the baker reappeared, though it was barely half-past two, and with many loud oaths roughly settled himself on a bench in the hall. The young woman listened to him from the first floor. She was pale, and it caused her especial pain to hear the servants' secret rejoicings swelling up louder and louder till they even reached her ears. Down in the kitchen they were dying of laughter. The coachman was staring across from the other side of the court; François was crossing the hall without any apparent reason. Then he hurried off to report progress, after sneering knowingly at the baker. They didn't care a damn for Madame; the walls were echoing to their laughter, and she felt that she was deserted on all hands and despised by the servants' hall, the inmates of which were watching her every movement and liberally bespattering her with the filthiest of chaff. Thereupon she abandoned the intention of borrowing the hundred and thirty-three francs from Zoé; she already owed the maid money, and she was too proud to risk a refusal now. Such a burst of feeling stirred her that she went back into her room, loudly remarking:

"Come, come, my girl, don't count on anyone but yourself. Your body's your own property, and it's better to make use of it than to let yourself be insulted."

And without even summoning Zoé she dressed herself with feverish haste in order to run round to the Tricon's. In hours of great embarrassment this was her last resource. Much sought after and constantly solicited by the old lady, she would refuse or resign herself according to her needs, and on these increasingly frequent occasions when both ends would not meet in her royally

conducted establishment, she was sure to find twenty-five louis awaiting her at the other's house. She used to betake herself to the Tricon's with the ease born of use, just as the poor go to the pawnshop.

But as she left her own chamber Nana came suddenly upon Georges standing in the middle of the drawing room. Not noticing his waxen pallor and the somber fire in his wide eyes, she gave a sigh of relief.

"Ah, you've come from your brother."

"No," said the lad, growing yet paler.

At this she gave a despairing shrug. What did he want? Why was he barring her way? She was in a hurry—yes, she was. Then returning to where he stood:

"You've no money, have you?"

"No."

"That's true. How silly of me! Never a stiver; not even their omnibus fares. Mamma doesn't wish it! Oh, what a set of men!"

And she escaped. But he held her back; he wanted to speak to her. She was fairly under way and again declared she had no time, but he stopped her with a word.

"Listen, I know you're going to marry my brother."

Gracious! The thing was too funny! And she let herself down into a chair in order to laugh at her ease.

"Yes," continued the lad, "and I don't wish it. It's I you're going to marry. That's why I've come."

"Eh, what? You too?" she cried. "Why, it's a family disease, is it? No, never! What a fancy, to be sure! Have I ever asked you to do anything so nasty? Neither one nor t'other of you! No, never!"

The lad's face brightened. Perhaps he had been deceiving himself! He continued:

"Then swear to me that you don't go to bed with my brother."

"Oh, you're beginning to bore me now!" said Nana, who had risen with renewed impatience. "It's amusing for a little while, but when I tell you I'm in a hurry—I go to bed with your brother if it pleases me. Are you keeping me—are you paymaster here that you insist on my making a report? Yes, I go to bed with your brother."

He had caught hold of her arm and squeezed it hard enough to break it as he stuttered:

"Don't say that! Don't say that!"

With a slight blow she disengaged herself from his grasp.

"He's maltreating me now! Here's a young ruffian for you! My chicken, you'll leave this jolly sharp. I used to keep you about out of niceness. Yes, I did! You may stare! Did you think I was going to be your mamma till I died? I've got better things to do than to bring up brats."

He listened to her stark with anguish, yet in utter submission. Her every word cut him to the heart so sharply that he felt he should die. She did not so much as notice his suffering and continued delightedly to revenge herself on him for the annoyance of the morning.

"It's like your brother; he's another pretty Johnny, he is! He promised me two hundred francs. Oh, dear me; yes, I can wait for 'em. It isn't his money I care for! I've not got enough to pay for hair oil. Yes, he's leaving me in a jolly fix! Look here, d'you want to know how matters stand? Here goes then: it's all owing to your brother that I'm going out to earn twenty-five louis with another man."

At these words his head spun, and he barred her egress. He cried; he besought her not to go, clasping his hands together and blurting out:

"Oh no! Oh no!"

"I want to, I do," she said. "Have you the money?"

No, he had not got the money. He would have given his life to have the money! Never before had he felt so miserable, so useless, so very childish. All his wretched being was shaken with weeping and gave proof of such heavy suffering that at last she noticed it and grew kind. She pushed him away softly.

"Come, my pet, let me pass; I must. Be reasonable. You're a baby boy, and it was very nice for a week, but nowadays I must look after my own affairs. Just think it over a bit. Now your brother's a man; what I'm saying doesn't apply to him. Oh, please do me a favor; it's no good telling him all this. He needn't know where I'm going. I always let out too much when I'm in a rage."

She began laughing. Then taking him in her arms and kissing him on the forehead:

"Good-by, baby," she said; "it's over, quite over between us; d'you understand? And now I'm off!"

And she left him, and he stood in the middle of the drawing room. Her last words rang like the knell of a tocsin in his ears: "It's over, quite over!" And he thought the ground was opening beneath his feet. There was a void in his brain from which the man awaiting Nana had disappeared. Philippe alone remained there in the young woman's bare embrace forever and ever. She did not deny it: she loved him, since she wanted to spare him the pain of her infidelity. It was over, quite over. He breathed heavily and gazed round the room, suffocating beneath a crushing weight. Memories kept recurring to him one after the other—memories of merry nights at La Mignotte, of amorous hours during which he had fancied himself her child, of pleasures stolen in this very room. And now these things would never, never recur! He was too small; he had not grown up quickly enough; Philippe was supplanting him because he was a bearded man. So then this was the end; he could not go on living. His vicious passion had become transformed into an infinite tenderness, a sensual adoration, in which his whole being was merged. Then, too, how was he to forget it all if his brother remained—his brother, blood of his blood, a second self, whose enjoyment drove him mad with jealousy? It was the end of all things; he wanted to die.

All the doors remained open, as the servants noisily scattered over the house after seeing Madame make her exit on foot. Downstairs on the bench in the hall the baker was laughing with Charles and François. Zoé came running across the drawing room and seemed surprised at sight of Georges. She asked

him if he were waiting for Madame. Yes, he was waiting for her; he had forgotten to give her an answer to a question. And when he was alone he set to work and searched. Finding nothing else to suit his purpose, he took up in the dressing room a pair of very sharply pointed scissors with which Nana had a mania for ceaselessly trimming herself, either by polishing her skin or cutting off little hairs. Then for a whole hour he waited patiently, his hand in his pocket and his fingers tightly clasped round the scissors.

"Here's Madame," said Zoé, returning. She must have espied her through the bedroom window.

There was a sound of people racing through the house, and laughter died away and doors were shut. Georges heard Nana paying the baker and speaking in the curtest way. Then she came upstairs.

"What, you're here still!" she said as she noticed him. "Aha! We're going to grow angry, my good man!"

He followed her as she walked toward her bedroom.

"Nana, will you marry me?"

She shrugged her shoulders. It was too stupid; she refused to answer any more and conceived the idea of slamming the door in his face.

"Nana, will you marry me?"

She slammed the door. He opened it with one hand while he brought the other and the scissors out of his pocket. And with one great stab he simply buried them in his breast.

Nana, meanwhile, had felt conscious that something dreadful would happen, and she had turned round. When she saw him stab himself she was seized with indignation.

"Oh, what a fool he is! What a fool! And with my scissors! Will you leave off, you naughty little rogue? Oh, my God! Oh, my God!"

She was scared. Sinking on his knees, the boy had just given himself a second stab, which sent him down at full length on the carpet. He blocked the threshold of the bedroom. With that Nana lost her head utterly and screamed with all her might, for she dared not step over his body, which shut her in and prevented her from running to seek assistance.

"Zoé! Zoé! Come at once. Make him leave off. It's getting stupid—a child like that! He's killing himself now! And in my place too! Did you ever see the like of it?"

He was frightening her. He was all white, and his eyes were shut. There was scarcely any bleeding—only a little blood, a tiny stain which was oozing down into his waistcoat. She was making up her mind to step over the body when an apparition sent her starting back. An old lady was advancing through the drawing-room door, which remained wide open opposite. And in her terror she recognized Mme Hugon but could not explain her presence. Still wearing her gloves and hat, Nana kept edging backward, and her terror grew so great that she sought to defend herself, and in a shaky voice:

"Madame," she cried, "it isn't I; I swear to you it isn't. He wanted to marry me, and I said no, and he's killed himself!"

Slowly Mme Hugon drew near—she was in black, and her face showed pale

under her white hair. In the carriage, as she drove thither, the thought of Georges had vanished and that of Philippe's misdoing had again taken complete possession of her. It might be that this woman could afford explanations to the judges which would touch them, and so she conceived the project of begging her to bear witness in her son's favor. Downstairs the doors of the house stood open, but as she mounted to the first floor her sick feet failed her, and she was hesitating as to which way to go when suddenly horror-stricken cries directed her. Then upstairs she found a man lying on the floor with bloodstained shirt. It was Georges—it was her other child.

Nana, in idiotic tones, kept saying:

"He wanted to marry me, and I said no, and he's killed himself."

Uttering no cry, Mine Hugon stooped down. Yes, it was the other one; it was Georges. The one was brought to dishonor, the other murdered! It caused her no surprise, for her whole life was ruined. Kneeling on the carpet, utterly forgetting where she was, noticing no one else, she gazed fixedly at her boy's face and listened with her hand on his heart. Then she gave a feeble sigh—she had felt the heart beating. And with that she lifted her head and scrutinized the room and the woman and seemed to remember. A fire glowed forth in her vacant eyes, and she looked so great and terrible in her silence that Nana trembled as she continued to defend herself above the body that divided them.

"I swear it, madame! If his brother were here he could explain it to you."

"His brother has robbed—he is in prison," said the mother in a hard voice.

Nana felt a choking sensation. Why, what was the reason of it all? The other had turned thief now! They were mad in that family! She ceased struggling in self-defense; she seemed no longer mistress in her own house and allowed Mme Hugon to give what orders she liked. The servants had at last hurried up, and the old lady insisted on their carrying the fainting Georges down to her carriage. She preferred killing him rather than letting him remain in that house. With an air of stupefaction Nana watched the retreating servants as they supported poor, dear Zizi by his legs and shoulders. The mother walked behind them in a state of collapse; she supported herself against the furniture; she felt as if all she held dear had vanished in the void. On the landing a sob escaped her; she turned and twice ejaculated:

"Oh, but you've done us infinite harm! You've done us infinite harm!"

That was all. In her stupefaction Nana had sat down; she still wore her gloves and her hat. The house once more lapsed into heavy silence; the carriage had driven away, and she sat motionless, not knowing what to do next, her head swimming after all she had gone through. A quarter of an hour later Count Muffat found her thus, but at sight of him she relieved her feelings in an overflowing current of talk. She told him all about the sad incident, repeated the same details twenty times over, picked up the bloodstained scissors in order to imitate Zizi's gesture when he stabbed himself. And above all she nursed the idea of proving her own innocence.

"Look you here, dearie, is it my fault? If you were the judge would you condemn me? I certainly didn't tell Philippe to meddle with the till any more

than I urged that wretched boy to kill himself. I've been most unfortunate throughout it all. They come and do stupid things in my place; they make me miserable; they treat me like a hussy."

And she burst into tears. A fit of nervous expansiveness rendered her soft and doleful, and her immense distress melted her utterly.

"And you, too, look as if you weren't satisfied. Now do just ask Zoé if I'm at all mixed up in it. Zoé, do speak: explain to Monsieur—"

The lady's maid, having brought a towel and a basin of water out of the dressing room, had for some moments past been rubbing the carpet in order to remove the bloodstains before they dried.

"Oh, monsieur," she declared, "Madame is utterly miserable!"

Muffat was still stupefied; the tragedy had frozen him, and his imagination was full of the mother weeping for her sons. He knew her greatness of heart and pictured her in her widow's weeds, withering solitarily away at Les Fondettes. But Nana grew ever more despondent, for now the memory of Zizi lying stretched on the floor, with a red hole in his shirt, almost drove her senseless.

"He used to be such a darling, so sweet and caressing. Oh, you know, my pet—I'm sorry if it vexes you—I loved that baby! I can't help saying so; the words must out. Besides, now it ought not to hurt you at all. He's gone. You've got what you wanted; you're quite certain never to surprise us again."

And this last reflection tortured her with such regret that he ended by turning comforter. Well, well, he said, she ought to be brave; she was quite right; it wasn't her fault! But she checked her lamentations of her own accord in order to say:

"Listen, you must run round and bring me news of him. At once! I wish it!"

He took his hat and went to get news of Georges. When he returned after some three quarters of an hour he saw Nana leaning anxiously out of a window, and he shouted up to her from the pavement that the lad was not dead and that they even hoped to bring him through. At this she immediately exchanged grief for excess of joy and began to sing and dance and vote existence delightful. Zoé, meanwhile, was still dissatisfied with her washing. She kept looking at the stain, and every time she passed it she repeated:

"You know it's not gone yet, madame."

As a matter of fact, the pale red stain kept reappearing on one of the white roses in the carpet pattern. It was as though, on the very threshold of the room, a splash of blood were barring the doorway.

"Bah!" said the joyous Nana. "That 'll be rubbed out under people's feet."

After the following day Count Muffat had likewise forgotten the incident. For a moment or two, when in the cab which drove him to the Rue Richelieu, he had busily sworn never to return to that woman's house. Heaven was warning him; the misfortunes of Philippe and Georges were, he opined, prophetic of his proper ruin. But neither the sight of Mme Hugon in tears nor that of the boy burning with fever had been strong enough to make him keep his vow, and the short-lived horror of the situation had only left behind it a

sense of secret delight at the thought that he was now well quit of a rival, the charm of whose youth had always exasperated him. His passion had by this time grown exclusive; it was, indeed, the passion of a man who has had no youth. He loved Nana as one who yearned to be her sole possessor, to listen to her, to touch her, to be breathed on by her. His was now a supersensual tenderness, verging on pure sentiment; it was an anxious affection and as such was jealous of the past and apt at times to dream of a day of redemption and pardon received, when both should kneel before God the Father. Every day religion kept regaining its influence over him. He again became a practicing Christian; he confessed himself and communicated, while a ceaseless struggle raged within him, and remorse redoubled the joys of sin and of repentance. Afterward, when his director gave him leave to spend his passion, he had made a habit of this daily perdition and would redeem the same by ecstasies of faith, which were full of pious humility. Very naïvely he offered heaven, by way of expiatory anguish, the abominable torment from which he was suffering. This torment grew and increased, and he would climb his Calvary with the deep and solemn feelings of a believer, though steeped in a harlot's fierce sensuality. That which made his agony most poignant was this woman's continued faithlessness. He could not share her with others, nor did he understand her imbecile caprices. Undying, unchanging love was what he wished for. However, she had sworn, and he paid her as having done so. But he felt that she was untruthful, incapable of common fidelity, apt to yield to friends, to stray passers-by, like a good-natured animal, born to live minus a shift.

One morning when he saw Foucarmont emerging from her bedroom at an unusual hour, he made a scene about it. But in her weariness of his jealousy she grew angry directly. On several occasions ere that she had behaved rather prettily. Thus the evening when he surprised her with Georges she was the first to regain her temper and to confess herself in the wrong. She had loaded him with caresses and dosed him with soft speeches in order to make him swallow the business. But he had ended by boring her to death with his obstinate refusals to understand the feminine nature, and now she was brutal.

"Very well, yes! I've slept with Foucarmont. What then? That's flattened you out a bit, my little rough, hasn't it?"

It was the first time she had thrown "my little rough" in his teeth. The frank directness of her avowal took his breath away, and when he began clenching his fists she marched up to him and looked him full in the face.

"We've had enough of this, eh? If it doesn't suit you you'll do me the pleasure of leaving the house. I don't want you to go yelling in my place. Just you get it into your noodle that I mean to be quite free. When a man pleases me I go to bed with him. Yes, I do—that's my way! And you must make up your mind directly. Yes or no! If it's no, out you may walk!"

She had gone and opened the door, but he did not leave. That was her way now of binding him more closely to her. For no reason whatever, at the slightest approach to a quarrel she would tell him he might stop or go as he liked, and she would accompany her permission with a flood of odious reflections. She said she could always find better than he; she had only too many

from whom to choose; men in any quantity could be picked up in the street, and men a good deal smarter, too, whose blood boiled in their veins. At this he would hang his head and wait for those gentler moods when she wanted money. She would then become affectionate, and he would forget it all, one night of tender dalliance making up for the tortures of a whole week. His reconciliation with his wife had rendered his home unbearable. Fauchery, having again fallen under Rose's dominion, the countess was running madly after other loves. She was entering on the forties, that restless, feverish time in the life of women, and ever hysterically nervous, she now filled her mansion with the maddening whirl of her fashionable life. Estelle, since her marriage, had seen nothing of her father; the undeveloped, insignificant girl had suddenly become a woman of iron will, so imperious withal that Dagueuet trembled in her presence. In these days he accompanied her to mass: he was converted, and he raged against his father-in-law for ruining them with a courtesan. M. Venot alone still remained kindly inclined toward the count, for he was biding his time. He had even succeeded in getting into Nana's immediate circle. In fact, he frequented both houses, where you encountered his continual smile behind doors. So Muffat, wretched at home, driven out by ennui and shame, still preferred to live in the Avenue de Villiers, even though he was abused there.

Soon there was but one question between Nana and the count, and that was "money." One day after having formally promised her ten thousand francs he had dared keep his appointment empty handed. For two days past she had been surfeiting him with love, and such a breach of faith, such a waste of caresses, made her ragingly abusive. She was white with fury.

"So you've not got the money, eh? Then go back where you came from, my little rough, and look sharp about it! There's a bloody fool for you! He wanted to kiss me again! Mark my words—no money, no nothing!"

He explained matters; he would be sure to have the money the day after tomorrow. But she interrupted him violently:

"And my bills! They'll sell me up while Monsieur's playing the fool. Now then, look at yourself. D'ye think I love you for your figure? A man with a mug like yours has to pay the women who are kind enough to put up with him. By God, if you don't bring me that ten thousand francs tonight you shan't even have the tip of my little finger to suck. I mean it! I shall send you back to your wife!"

At night he brought the ten thousand francs. Nana put up her lips, and he took a long kiss which consoled him for the whole day of anguish. What annoyed the young woman was to have him continually tied to her apron strings. She complained to M. Venot, begging him to take her little rough off to the countess. Was their reconciliation good for nothing then? She was sorry she had mixed herself up in it, since despite everything he was always at her heels. On the days when, out of anger, she forgot her own interest, she swore to play him such a dirty trick that he would never again be able to set foot in her place. But when she slapped her leg and yelled at him she might quite as well have spat in his face too: he would still have stayed and even

thanked her. Then the rows about money matters kept continually recurring. She demanded money savagely; she rowed him over wretched little amounts; she was odiously stingy with every minute of her time; she kept fiercely informing him that she slept with him for his money, not for any other reasons, and that she did not enjoy it a bit, that, in fact, she loved another and was awfully unfortunate in needing an idiot of his sort! They did not even want him at court now, and there was some talk of requiring him to send in his resignation. The empress had said, "He is too disgusting." It was true enough. So Nana repeated the phrase by way of closure to all their quarrels.

"Look here! You disgust me!"

Nowadays she no longer minded her ps and qs; she had regained the most perfect freedom.

Every day she did her round of the lake, beginning acquaintanceships which ended elsewhere. Here was the happy hunting ground par excellence, where courtesans of the first water spread their nets in open daylight and flaunted themselves amid the tolerating smiles and brilliant luxury of Paris. Duchesses pointed her out to one another with a passing look—rich shopkeepers' wives copied the fashion of her hats. Sometimes her landau, in its haste to get by, stopped a file of puissant turnouts, wherein sat plutocrats able to buy up all Europe or Cabinet ministers with plump fingers tight-pressed to the throat of France. She belonged to this Bois society, occupied a prominent place in it, was known in every capital and asked about by every foreigner. The splendors of this crowd were enhanced by the madness of her profligacy as though it were the very crown, the darling passion, of the nation. Then there were unions of a night, continual passages of desire, which she lost count of the morning after, and these sent her touring through the grand restaurants and on fine days, as often as not, to "Madrid." The staffs of all the embassies visited her, and she, Lucy Stewart, Caroline Héquet and Maria Blond would dine in the society of gentlemen who murdered the French language and paid to be amused, engaging them by the evening with orders to be funny and yet proving so blasé and so worn out that they never even touched them. This the ladies called "going on a spree," and they would return home happy at having been despised and would finish the night in the arms of the lovers of their choice.

When she did not actually throw the men at his head Count Muffat pretended not to know about all this. However, he suffered not a little from the lesser indignities of their daily life. The mansion in the Avenue de Villiers was becoming a hell, a house full of mad people, in which every hour of the day wild disorders led to hateful complications. Nana even fought with her servants. One moment she would be very nice with Charles, the coachman. When she stopped at a restaurant she would send him out beer by the waiter and would talk with him from the inside of her carriage when he slanged the cabbies at a block in the traffic, for then he struck her as funny and cheered her up. Then the next moment she called him a fool for no earthly reason. She was always squabbling over the straw, the bran or the oats; in spite of her love for animals she thought her horses ate too much. Accordingly one day

when she was settling up she accused the man of robbing her. At this Charles got in a rage and called her a whore right out; his horses, he said, were distinctly better than she was, for they did not sleep with everybody. She answered him in the same strain, and the count had to separate them and give the coachman the sack. This was the beginning of a rebellion among the servants. When her diamonds had been stolen Victorine and François left. Julien himself disappeared, and the tale ran that the master had given him a big bribe and had begged him to go, because he slept with the mistress. Every week there were new faces in the servants' hall. Never was there such a mess; the house was like a passage down which the scum of the registry offices galloped, destroying everything in their path. Zoé alone kept her place; she always looked clean, and her only anxiety was how to organize this riot until she had got enough together to set up on her own account in fulfillment of a plan she had been hatching for some time past.

These, again, were only the anxieties he could own to. The count put up with the stupidity of Mme Maloir, playing bezique with her in spite of her musty smell. He put up with Mme Lerat and her encumbrances, with Louiset and the mournful complaints peculiar to a child who is being eaten up with the rottenness inherited from some unknown father. But he spent hours worse than these. One evening he had heard Nana angrily telling her maid that a man pretending to be rich had just swindled her—a handsome man calling himself an American and owning gold mines in his own country, a beast who had gone off while she was asleep without giving her a copper and had even taken a packet of cigarette papers with him. The count had turned very pale and had gone downstairs again on tiptoe so as not to hear more. But later he had to hear all. Nana, having been smitten with a baritone in a music hall and having been thrown over by him, wanted to commit suicide during a fit of sentimental melancholia. She swallowed a glass of water in which she had soaked a box of matches. This made her terribly sick but did not kill her. The count had to nurse her and to listen to the whole story of her passion, her tearful protests and her oaths never to take to any man again. In her contempt for those swine, as she called them, she could not, however, keep her heart free, for she always had some sweetheart round her, and her exhausted body inclined to incomprehensible fancies and perverse tastes. As Zoé desiginedly relaxed her efforts the service of the house had got to such a pitch that Muffat did not dare to push open a door, to pull a curtain or to uncloset a cupboard. The bells did not ring; men lounged about everywhere and at every moment knocked up against one another. He had now to cough before entering a room, having almost caught the girl hanging round Francis' neck one evening that he had just gone out of the dressing room for two minutes to tell the coachman to put the horses to, while her hairdresser was finishing her hair. She gave herself up suddenly behind his back; she took her pleasure in every corner, quickly, with the first man she met. Whether she was in her chemise or in full dress did not matter. She would come back to the count red all over, happy at having cheated him. As for him, he was plagued to death; it was an abominable infliction!

In his jealous anguish the unhappy man was comparatively at peace when he left Nana and Satin alone together. He would have willingly urged her on to this vice, to keep the men off her. But all was spoiled in this direction too. Nana deceived Satin as she deceived the count, going mad over some monstrous fancy or other and picking up girls at the street corners. Coming back in her carriage, she would suddenly be taken with a little slut that she saw on the pavement; her senses would be captivated, her imagination excited. She would take the little slut in with her, pay her and send her away again. Then, disguised as a man, she would go to infamous houses and look on at scenes of debauch to while away hours of boredom. And Satin, angry at being thrown over every moment, would turn the house topsy-turvy with the most awful scenes. She had at last acquired a complete ascendancy over Nana, who now respected her. Muffat even thought of an alliance between them. When he dared not say anything he let Satin loose. Twice she had compelled her darling to take up with him again, while he showed himself obliging and effaced himself in her favor at the least sign. But this good understanding lasted no time, for Satin, too, was a little cracked. On certain days she would very nearly go mad and would smash everything, wearing herself out in tempest of love and anger, but pretty all the time. Zoé must have excited her, for the maid took her into corners as if she wanted to tell her about her great design of which she as yet spoke to no one.

At times, however, Count Muffat was still singularly revolted. He who had tolerated Satin for months, who had at last shut his eyes to the unknown herd of men that scampered so quickly through Nana's bedroom, became terribly enraged at being deceived by one of his own set or even by an acquaintance. When she confessed her relations with Foucarmont he suffered so acutely, he thought the treachery of the young man so base, that he wished to insult him and fight a duel. As he did not know where to find seconds for such an affair, he went to Labordette. The latter, astonished, could not help laughing.

"A duel about Nana? But, my dear sir, all Paris would be laughing at you. Men do not fight for Nana; it would be ridiculous."

The count grew very pale and made a violent gesture.

"Then I shall slap his face in the open street."

For an hour Labordette had to argue with him. A blow would make the affair odious; that evening everyone would know the real reason of the meeting; it would be in all the papers. And Labordette always finished with the same expression:

"It is impossible; it would be ridiculous."

Each time Muffat heard these words they seemed sharp and keen as a stab. He could not even fight for the woman he loved; people would have burst out laughing. Never before had he felt more bitterly the misery of his love, the contrast between his heavy heart and the absurdity of this life of pleasure in which it was now lost. This was his last rebellion; he allowed Labordette to convince him, and he was present afterward at the procession of his friends, who lived there as if at home.

Nana in a few months finished them up greedily, one after the other. The

growing needs entailed by her luxurious way of life only added fuel to her desires, and she finished a man up at one mouthful. First she had Foucarmont, who did not last a fortnight. He was thinking of leaving the navy, having saved about thirty thousand francs in his ten years of service, which he wished to invest in the United States. His instincts, which were prudential, even miserly, were conquered; he gave her everything, even his signature to notes of hand, which pledged his future. When Nana had done with him he was penniless. But then she proved very kind; she advised him to return to his ship. What was the good of getting angry? Since he had no money their relations were no longer possible. He ought to understand that and to be reasonable. A ruined man fell from her hands like a ripe fruit, to rot on the ground by himself.

Then Nana took up with Steiner without disgust but without love. She called him a dirty Jew; she seemed to be paying back an old grudge, of which she had no distinct recollection. He was fat; he was stupid, and she got him down and took two bites at a time in order the quicker to do for this Prussian. As for him, he had thrown Simonne over. His Bosphorous scheme was getting shaky, and Nana hastened the downfall by wild expenses. For a month he struggled on, doing miracles of finance. He filled Europe with posters, advertisements and prospectuses of a colossal scheme and obtained money from the most distant climes. All these savings, the pounds of speculators and the pence of the poor, were swallowed up in the Avenue de Villiers. Again he was partner in an ironworks in Alsace, where in a small provincial town workmen, blackened with coal dust and soaked with sweat, day and night strained their sinews and heard their bones crack to satisfy Nana's pleasures. Like a huge fire she devoured all the fruits of stock-exchange swindling and the profits of labor. This time she did for Steiner; she brought him to the ground, sucked him dry to the core, left him so cleaned out that he was unable to invent a new roguery. When his bank failed he stammered and trembled at the idea of prosecution. His bankruptcy had just been published, and the simple mention of money flurried him and threw him into a childish embarrassment. And this was he who had played with millions. One evening at Nana's he began to cry and asked her for a loan of a hundred francs wherewith to pay his maid-servant. And Nana, much affected and amused at the end of this terrible old man who had squeezed Paris for twenty years, brought it to him and said:

"I say, I'm giving it you because it seems so funny! But listen to me, my boy, you are too old for me to keep. You must find something else to do."

Then Nana started on La Faloise at once. He had for some time been longing for the honor of being ruined by her in order to put the finishing stroke on his smartness. He needed a woman to launch him properly; it was the one thing still lacking. In two months all Paris would be talking of him, and he would see his name in the papers. Six weeks were enough. His inheritance was in landed estate, houses, fields, woods and farms. He had to sell all, one after the other, as quickly as he could. At every mouthful Nana swallowed an acre. The foliage trembling in the sunshine, the wide fields of ripe grain, the vineyards so golden in September, the tall grass in which the cows stood

knee-deep, all passed through her hands as if engulfed by an abyss. Even fishing rights, a stone quarry and three mills disappeared. Nana passed over them like an invading army or one of those swarms of locusts whose flight scours a whole province. The ground was burned up where her little foot had rested. Farm by farm, field by field, she ate up the man's patrimony very prettily and quite inattentively, just as she would have eaten a box of sweetmeats flung into her lap between mealtimes. There was no harm in it all; they were only sweets! But at last one evening there only remained a single little wood. She swallowed it up disdainfully, as it was hardly worth the trouble opening one's mouth for. La Faloise laughed idiotically and sucked the top of his stick. His debts were crushing him; he was not worth a hundred francs a year, and he saw that he would be compelled to go back into the country and live with his maniacal uncle. But that did not matter; he had achieved smartness; the *Figaro* had printed his name twice. And with his meager neck sticking up between the turndown points of his collar and his figure squeezed into all too short a coat, he would swagger about, uttering his parrotlike exclamations and affecting a solemn listlessness suggestive of an emotionless marionette. He so annoyed Nana that she ended by beating him.

Meanwhile Fauchery had returned, his cousin having brought him. Poor Fauchery had now set up housekeeping. After having thrown over the countess he had fallen into Rose's hands, and she treated him as a lawful wife would have done. Mignon was simply Madame's major-domo. Installed as master of the house, the journalist lied to Rose and took all sorts of precautions when he deceived her. He was as scrupulous as a good husband, for he really wanted to settle down at last. Nana's triumph consisted in possessing and in ruining a newspaper that he had started with a friend's capital. She did not proclaim her triumph; on the contrary, she delighted in treating him as a man who had to be circumspect, and when she spoke of Rose it was as "poor Rose." The newspaper kept her in flowers for two months. She took all the provincial subscriptions; in fact, she took everything, from the column of news and gossip down to the dramatic notes. Then the editorial staff having been turned topsy-turvy and the management completely disorganized, she satisfied a fanciful caprice and had a winter garden constructed in a corner of her house: that carried off all the type. But then it was no joke after all! When in his delight at the whole business Mignon came to see if he could not saddle Fauchery on her altogether, she asked him if he took her for a fool. A penniless fellow living by his articles and his plays—not if she knew it! That sort of foolishness might be all very well for a clever woman like her poor, dear Rose! She grew distrustful: she feared some treachery on Mignon's part, for he was quite capable of preaching to his wife, and so she gave Fauchery his *congé* as he now only paid her in fame.

But she always recollected him kindly. They had both enjoyed themselves so much at the expense of that fool of a La Faloise! They would never have thought of seeing each other again if the delight of fooling such a perfect idiot had not egged them on! It seemed an awfully good joke to kiss each other under his very nose. They cut a regular dash with his coin; they would

send him off full speed to the other end of Paris in order to be alone and then, when he came back, they would crack jokes and make allusions he could not understand. One day, urged by the journalist, she bet that she would smack his face, and that she did the very same evening and went on to harder blows, for she thought it a good joke and was glad of the opportunity of showing how cowardly men were. She called him her "slapjack" and would tell him to come and have his smack! The smacks made her hands red, for as yet she was not up to the trick. La Faloise laughed in his idiotic, languid way, though his eyes were full of tears. He was delighted at such familiarity; he thought it simply stunning.

One night when he had received sundry cuffs and was greatly excited: "Now, d'you know," he said, "you ought to marry me. We should be as jolly as grigs together, eh?"

This was no empty suggestion. Seized with a desire to astonish Paris, he had been slyly projecting this marriage. "Nana's husband! Wouldn't that sound smart, eh?" Rather a stunning apotheosis that! But Nana gave him a fine snubbing.

"Me marry you! Lovely! If such an idea had been tormenting me I should have found a husband a long time ago! And he'd have been a man worth twenty of you, my pippin! I've had a heap of proposals. Why, look here, just reckon 'em up with me: Philippe, Georges, Foucarmont, Steiner—that makes four, without counting the others you don't know. It's a chorus they all sing. I can't be nice, but they forthwith begin yelling, 'Will you marry me? Will you marry me?'"

She lashed herself up and then burst out in fine indignation:

"Oh dear, no! I don't want to! D'you think I'm built that way? Just look at me a bit! Why, I shouldn't be Nana any longer if I fastened a man on behind! And, besides, it's too foul!"

And she spat and hiccuped with disgust, as though she had seen all the dirt in the world spread out beneath her.

One evening La Faloise vanished, and a week later it became known that he was in the country with an uncle whose mania was botany. He was pasting his specimens for him and stood a chance of marrying a very plain, pious cousin. Nana shed no tears for him. She simply said to the count:

"Eh, little rough, another rival less! You're chortling today. But he was becoming serious! He wanted to marry me."

He waxed pale, and she flung her arms round his neck and hung there, laughing, while she emphasized every little cruel speech with a caress.

"You can't marry Nana! Isn't that what's fetching you, eh? When they're all bothering me with their marriages you're raging in your corner. It isn't possible; you must wait till your wife kicks the bucket. Oh, if she were only to do that, how you'd come rushing round! How you'd fling yourself on the ground and make your offer with all the grand accompaniments—sighs and tears and vows! Wouldn't it be nice, darling, eh?"

Her voice had become soft, and she was chaffing him in a ferociously whee-

dling manner. He was deeply moved and began blushing as he paid her back her kisses. Then she cried:

"By God, to think I should have guessed! He's thought about it; he's waiting for his wife to go off the hooks! Well, well, that's the finishing touch! Why, he's even a bigger rascal than the others!"

Muffat had resigned himself to "the others." Nowadays he was trusting to the last relics of his personal dignity in order to remain "Monsieur" among the servants and intimates of the house, the man, in fact, who because he gave most was the official lover. And his passion grew fiercer. He kept his position because he paid for it, buying even smiles at a high price. He was even robbed and he never got his money's worth, but a disease seemed to be gnawing his vitals from which he could not prevent himself suffering. Whenever he entered Nana's bedroom he was simply content to open the windows for a second or two in order to get rid of the odors the others left behind them, the essential smells of fair-haired men and dark, the smoke of cigars, of which the pungency choked him. This bedroom was becoming a veritable thoroughfare, so continually were boots wiped on its threshold. Yet never a man among them was stopped by the bloodstain barring the door. Zoé was still preoccupied by this stain; it was a simple mania with her, for she was a clean girl, and it horrified her to see it always there. Despite everything her eyes would wander in its direction, and she now never entered Madame's room without remarking:

"It's strange that don't go. All the same, plenty of folk come in this way."

Nana kept receiving the best news from Georges, who was by that time already convalescent in his mother's keeping at Les Fondettes, and she used always to make the same reply.

"Oh, hang it, time's all that's wanted. It's apt to grow paler as feet cross it."

As a matter of fact, each of the gentlemen, whether Foucarmont, Steiner, La Faloise or Fauchery, had borne away some of it on their bootsoles. And Muffat, whom the bloodstain preoccupied as much as it did Zoé, kept studying it in his own despite, as though in its gradual rosy disappearance he would read the number of men that passed. He secretly dreaded it and always stepped over it out of a vivid fear of crushing some live thing, some naked limb lying on the floor.

But in the bedroom within he would grow dizzy and intoxicated and would forget everything—the mob of men which constantly crossed it, the sign of mourning which barred its door. Outside, in the open air of the street, he would weep occasionally out of sheer shame and disgust and would vow never to enter the room again. And the moment the portiere had closed behind him he was under the old influence once more and felt his whole being melting in the damp warm air of the place, felt his flesh penetrated by a perfume, felt himself overborne by a voluptuous yearning for self-annihilation. Pious and habituated to ecstatic experiences in sumptuous chapels, he there re-encountered precisely the same mystical sensations as when he knelt under some painted window and gave way to the intoxication of organ music and incense. Woman swayed him as jealously and despotically as the God of wrath, terri-

fying him, granting him moments of delight, which were like spasms in their keenness, in return for hours filled with frightful, tormenting visions of hell and eternal tortures. In Nana's presence, as in church, the same stammering accents were his, the same prayers and the same fits of despair—nay, the same paroxysms of humility peculiar to an accursed creature who is crushed down in the mire from whence he has sprung. His fleshly desires, his spiritual needs, were confounded together and seemed to spring from the obscure depths of his being and to bear but one blossom on the tree of his existence. He abandoned himself to the power of love and of faith, those twin levers which move the world. And despite all the struggles of his reason this bedroom of Nana's always filled him with madness, and he would sink shuddering under the almighty dominion of sex, just as he would swoon before the vast unknown of heaven.

Then when she felt how humble he was Nana grew tyrannously triumphant. The rage for debasing things was inborn in her. It did not suffice her to destroy them; she must soil them too. Her delicate hands left abominable traces and themselves decomposed whatever they had broken. And he in his imbecile condition lent himself to this sort of sport, for he was possessed by vaguely remembered stories of saints who were devoured by vermin and in turn devoured their own excrements. When once she had him fast in her room and the doors were shut, she treated herself to a man's infamy. At first they joked together, and she would deal him light blows and impose quaint tasks on him, making him lisp like a child and repeat tags of sentences.

"Say as I do: 'tonfound it! Ickle man damn vell don't tare about it!'"

He would prove so docile as to reproduce her very accent.

"'Tonfound it! Ickle man damn vell don't tare about it!'"

Or again she would play bear, walking on all fours on her rugs when she had only her chemise on and turning round with a growl as though she wanted to eat him. She would even nibble his calves for the fun of the thing. Then, getting up again:

"It's your turn now; try it a bit. I bet you don't play bear like me."

It was still charming enough. As bear she amused him with her white skin and her fell of ruddy hair. He used to laugh and go down on all fours, too, and growl and bite her calves, while she ran from him with an affectation of terror.

"Are we beasts, eh?" she would end by saying. "You've no notion how ugly you are, my pet! Just think if they were to see you like that at the Tuileries!"

But ere long these little games were spoiled. It was not cruelty in her case, for she was still a good-natured girl; it was as though a passing wind of madness were blowing ever more strongly in the shut-up bedroom. A storm of lust disordered their brains, plunged them into the delirious imaginations of the flesh. The old pious terrors of their sleepless nights were now transforming themselves into a thirst for bestiality, a furious longing to walk on all fours, to growl and to bite. One day when he was playing bear she pushed him so roughly that he fell against a piece of furniture, and when she saw the lump on his forehead she burst into involuntary laughter. After that her experi-

ments on La Faloise having whetted her appetite, she treated him like an animal, threshing him and chasing him to an accompaniment of kicks.

"Gee up! Gee up! You're a horse. Hoi! Gee up! Won't you hurry up, you dirty screw?"

At other times he was a dog. She would throw her scented handkerchief to the far end of the room, and he had to run and pick it up with his teeth, dragging himself along on hands and knees.

"Fetch it, Caesar! Look here, I'll give you what for if you don't look sharp! Well done, Caesar! Good dog! Nice old fellow! Now behave pretty!"

And he loved his abasement and delighted in being a brute beast. He longed to sink still further and would cry:

"Hit harder. On, on! I'm wild! Hit away!"

She was seized with a whim and insisted on his coming to her one night clad in his magnificent chamberlain's costume. Then how she did laugh and make fun of him when she had him there in all his glory, with the sword and the cocked hat and the white breeches and the full-bottomed coat of red cloth laced with gold and the symbolic key hanging on its left-hand skirt. This key made her especially merry and urged her to a wildly fanciful and extremely filthy discussion of it. Laughing without cease and carried away by her irreverence for pomp and by the joy of debasing him in the official dignity of his costume, she shook him, pinched him, shouted, "Oh, get along with ye, Chamberlain!" and ended by an accompaniment of swinging kicks behind. Oh, those kicks! How heartily she rained them on the Tuileries and the majesty of the imperial court, throning on high above an abject and trembling people. That's what she thought of society! That was her revenge! It was an affair of unconscious hereditary spite; it had come to her in her blood. Then when once the chamberlain was undressed and his coat lay spread on the ground she shrieked, "Jump!" And he jumped. She shrieked, "Spit!" And he spat. With a shriek she bade him walk on the gold, on the eagles, on the decorations, and he walked on them. Hi tiddly hi ti! Nothing was left; everything was going to pieces. She smashed a chamberlain just as she smashed a flask or a comfit box, and she made filth of him, reduced him to a heap of mud at a street corner.

Meanwhile the goldsmiths had failed to keep their promise, and the bed was not delivered till one day about the middle of January. Muffat was just then in Normandy, whither he had gone to sell a last stray shred of property, but Nana demanded four thousand francs forthwith. He was not due in Paris till the day after tomorrow, but when his business was once finished he hastened his return and without even paying a flying visit in the Rue Miromesnil came direct to the Avenue de Villiers. Ten o'clock was striking. As he had a key of a little door opening on the Rue Cardinet, he went up unhindered. In the drawing room upstairs Zoé, who was polishing the bronzes, stood dumfounded at sight of him, and not knowing how to stop him, she began with much circumlocution, informing him that M. Venot, looking utterly beside himself, had been searching for him since yesterday and that he had already come twice to beg her to send Monsieur to his house if Monsieur arrived at Madame's

before going home. Muffat listened to her without in the least understanding the meaning of her recital; then he noticed her agitation and was seized by a sudden fit of jealousy of which he no longer believed himself capable. He threw himself against the bedroom door, for he heard the sound of laughter within. The door gave; its two flaps flew asunder, while Zoé withdrew, shrugging her shoulders. So much the worse for Madame! As Madame was bidding good-by to her wits, she might arrange matters for herself.

And on the threshold Muffat uttered a cry at the sight that was presented to his view.

"My God! My God!"

The renovated bedroom was resplendent in all its royal luxury. Silver buttons gleamed like bright stars on the tea-rose velvet of the hangings. These last were of that pink flesh tint which the skies assume on fine evenings, when Venus lights her fires on the horizon against the clear background of fading daylight. The golden cords and tassels hanging in corners and the gold lace-work surrounding the panels were like little flames of ruddy strands of loosened hair, and they half covered the wide nakedness of the room while they emphasized its pale, voluptuous tone. Then over against him there was the gold and silver bed, which shone in all the fresh splendor of its chiseled workmanship, a throne this of sufficient extent for Nana to display the outstretched glory of her naked limbs, an altar of Byzantine sumptuousness, worthy of the almighty puissance of Nana's sex, which at this very hour lay nudely displayed there in the religious immodesty befitting an idol of all men's worship. And close by, beneath the snowy reflections of her bosom and amid the triumph of the goddess, lay wallowing a shameful, decrepit thing, a comic and lamentable ruin, the Marquis de Chouard in his nightshirt.

The count had clasped his hands together and, shaken by a paroxysmal shuddering, he kept crying:

"My God! My God!"

It was for the Marquis de Chouard, then, that the golden roses flourished on the side panels, those bunches of golden roses blooming among the golden leaves; it was for him that the Cupids leaned forth with amorous, roguish laughter from their tumbling ring on the silver trelliswork. And it was for him that the faun at his feet discovered the nymph sleeping, tired with dalliance, the figure of Night copied down to the exaggerated thighs—which caused her to be recognizable of all—from Nana's renowned nudity. Cast there like the rag of something human which has been spoiled and dissolved by sixty years of debauchery, he suggested the charnelhouse amid the glory of the woman's dazzling contours. Seeing the door open, he had risen up, smitten with sudden terror as became an infirm old man. This last night of passion had rendered him imbecile; he was entering on his second childhood; and, his speech failing him, he remained in an attitude of flight, half-paralyzed, stammering, shivering, his nightshirt half up his skeleton shape, and one leg outside the clothes, a livid leg, covered with gray hair. Despite her vexation Nana could not keep from laughing.

"Do lie down! Stuff yourself into the bed," she said, pulling him back and

burying him under the coverlet, as though he were some filthy thing she could not show anyone.

Then she sprang up to shut the door again. She was decidedly never lucky with her little rough. He was always coming when least wanted. And why had he gone to fetch money in Normandy? The old man had brought her the four thousand francs, and she had let him have his will of her. She pushed back the two flaps of the door and shouted:

"So much the worse for you! It's your fault. Is that the way to come into a room? I've had enough of this sort of thing. Ta ta!"

Muffat remained standing before the closed door, thunderstruck by what he had just seen. His shuddering fit increased. It mounted from his feet to his heart and brain. Then like a tree shaken by a mighty wind, he swayed to and fro and dropped on his knees, all his muscles giving way under him. And with hands despairingly outstretched he stammered:

"This is more than I can bear, my God! More than I can bear!"

He had accepted every situation but he could do so no longer. He had come to the end of his strength and was plunged in the dark void where man and his reason are together overthrown. In an extravagant access of faith he raised his hands ever higher and higher, searching for heaven, calling on God.

"Oh no, I do not desire it! Oh, come to me, my God! Succor me; nay, let me die sooner! Oh no, not that man, my God! It is over; take me, carry me away, that I may not see, that I may not feel any longer! Oh, I belong to you, my God! Our Father which art in heaven——"

And burning with faith, he continued his supplication, and an ardent prayer escaped from his lips. But someone touched him on the shoulder. He lifted his eyes; it was M. Venot. He was surprised to find him praying before that closed door. Then as though God Himself had responded to his appeal, the count flung his arms round the little old gentleman's neck. At last he could weep, and he burst out sobbing and repeated:

"My brother, my brother."

All his suffering humanity found comfort in that cry. He drenched M. Venot's face with tears; he kissed him, uttering fragmentary ejaculations.

"Oh, my brother, how I am suffering! You only are left me, my brother. Take me away forever—oh, for mercy's sake, take me away!"

Then M. Venot pressed him to his bosom and called him "brother" also. But he had a fresh blow in store for him. Since yesterday he had been searching for him in order to inform him that the Countess Sabine, in a supreme fit of moral aberration, had but now taken flight with the manager of one of the departments in a large, fancy emporium. It was a fearful scandal, and all Paris was already talking about it. Seeing him under the influence of such religious exaltation, Venot felt the opportunity to be favorable and at once told him of the meanly tragic shipwreck of his house. The count was not touched thereby. His wife had gone? That meant nothing to him; they would see what would happen later on. And again he was seized with anguish, and gazing with a look of terror at the door, the walls, the ceiling, he continued pouring forth his single supplication:

"Take me away! I cannot bear it any longer! Take me away!"

M. Venot took him away as though he had been a child. From that day forth Muffat belonged to him entirely; he again became strictly attentive to the duties of religion; his life was utterly blasted. He had resigned his position as chamberlain out of respect for the outraged modesty of the Tuileries, and soon Estelle, his daughter, brought an action against him for the recovery of a sum of sixty thousand francs, a legacy left her by an aunt to which she ought to have succeeded at the time of her marriage. Ruined and living narrowly on the remains of his great fortune, he let himself be gradually devoured by the countess, who ate up the husks Nana had rejected. Sabine was indeed ruined by the example of promiscuity set her by her husband's intercourse with the wanton. She was prone to every excess and proved the ultimate ruin and destruction of his very hearth. After sundry adventures she had returned home, and he had taken her back in a spirit of Christian resignation and forgiveness. She haunted him as his living disgrace, but he grew more and more indifferent and at last ceased suffering from these distresses. Heaven took him out of his wife's hands in order to restore him to the arms of God, and so the voluptuous pleasures he had enjoyed with Nana were prolonged in religious ecstasies, accompanied by the old stammering utterances, the old prayers and despairs, the old fits of humility which befit an accursed creature who is crushed beneath the mire whence he sprang. In the recesses of churches, his knees chilled by the pavement, he would once more experience the delights of the past, and his muscles would twitch, and his brain would whirl deliciously, and the satisfaction of the obscure necessities of his existence would be the same as of old.

On the evening of the final rupture Mignon presented himself at the house in the Avenue de Villiers. He was growing accustomed to Fauchery and was beginning at last to find the presence of his wife's husband infinitely advantageous to him. He would leave all the little household cares to the journalist and would trust him in the active superintendence of all their affairs. Nay, he devoted the money gained by his dramatic successes to the daily expenditure of the family, and as, on his part, Fauchery behaved sensibly, avoiding ridiculous jealousy and proving not less pliant than Mignon himself whenever Rose found her opportunity, the mutual understanding between the two men constantly improved. In fact, they were happy in a partnership which was so fertile in all kinds of amenities, and they settled down side by side and adopted a family arrangement which no longer proved a stumbling block. The whole thing was conducted according to rule; it suited admirably, and each man vied with the other in his efforts for the common happiness. That very evening Mignon had come by Fauchery's advice to see if he could not steal Nana's lady's maid from her, the journalist having formed a high opinion of the woman's extraordinary intelligence. Rose was in despair; for a month past she had been falling into the hands of inexperienced girls who were causing her continual embarrassment. When Zoé received him at the door he forthwith pushed her into the dining room. But at his opening sentence she smiled. The thing was impossible, she said, for she was leaving Madame and estab-

lishing herself on her own account. And she added with an expression of discreet vanity that she was daily receiving offers, that the ladies were fighting for her and that Mme Blanche would give a pile of gold to have her back.

Zoé was taking the Tricon's establishment. It was an old project and had been long brooded over. It was her ambition to make her fortune thereby, and she was investing all her savings in it. She was full of great ideas and meditated increasing the business and hiring a house and combining all the delights within its walls. It was with this in view that she had tried to entice Satin, a little pig at that moment dying in hospital, so terribly had she done for herself.

Mignon still insisted with his offer and spoke of the risks run in the commercial life, but Zoé, without entering into explanations about the exact nature of her establishment, smiled a pinched smile, as though she had just put a sweetmeat in her mouth, and was content to remark:

"Oh, luxuries always pay. You see, I've been with others quite long enough, and now I want others to be with me."

And a fierce look set her lip curling. At last she would be "Madame," and for the sake of earning a few louis all those women whose slops she had emptied during the last fifteen years would prostrate themselves before her.

Mignon wished to be announced, and Zoé left him for a moment after remarking that Madame had passed a miserable day. He had only been at the house once before, and he did not know it at all. The dining room with its Gobelin tapestry, its sideboard and its plate filled him with astonishment. He opened the doors familiarly and visited the drawing room and the winter garden, returning thence into the hall. This overwhelming luxury, this gilded furniture, these silks and velvets, gradually filled him with such a feeling of admiration that it set his heart beating. When Zoé came down to fetch him she offered to show him the other rooms, the dressing room, that is to say, and the bedroom. In the latter Mignon's feelings overcame him; he was carried away by them; they filled him with tender enthusiasm.

That damned Nana was simply stupefying him, and yet he thought he knew a thing or two. Amid the downfall of the house and the servants' wild, wasteful race to destruction, massed-up riches still filled every gaping hole and overtopped every ruined wall. And Mignon, as he viewed this lordly monument of wealth, began recalling to mind the various great works he had seen. Near Marseilles they had shown him an aqueduct, the stone arches of which bestrode an abyss, a Cyclopean work which cost millions of money and ten years of intense labor. At Cherbourg he had seen the new harbor with its enormous works, where hundreds of men sweated in the sun while cranes filled the sea with huge squares of rock and built up a wall where a workman now and again remained crushed into bloody pulp. But all that now struck him as insignificant. Nana excited him far more. Viewing the fruit of her labors, he once more experienced the feelings of respect that had overcome him one festal evening in a sugar refiner's château. This château had been erected for the refiner, and its palatial proportions and royal splendor had been paid for by a single material—sugar. It was with something quite different, with a little laughable folly, a little delicate nudity—it was with this shameful

trifle, which is so powerful as to move the universe, that she alone, without workmen, without the inventions of engineers, had shaken Paris to its foundations and had built up a fortune on the bodies of dead men.

"Oh, by God, what an implement!"

Mignon let the words escape him in his ecstasy, for he felt a return of personal gratitude.

Nana had gradually lapsed into a most mournful condition. To begin with, the meeting of the marquis and the count had given her a severe fit of feverish nervousness, which verged at times on laughter. Then the thought of this old man going away half dead in a cab and of her poor rough, whom she would never set eyes on again now that she had driven him so wild, brought on what looked like the beginnings of melancholia. After that she grew vexed to hear about Satin's illness. The girl had disappeared about a fortnight ago and was now ready to die at Lariboisière, to such a damnable state had Mme Robert reduced her. When she ordered the horses to be put to in order that she might have a last sight of this vile little wretch Zoé had just quietly given her a week's notice. The announcement drove her to desperation at once! It seemed to her she was losing a member of her own family. Great heavens! What was to become of her when left alone? And she besought Zoé to stay, and the latter, much flattered by Madame's despair, ended by kissing her to show that she was not going away in anger. No, she had positively to go: the heart could have no voice in matters of business.

But that day was one of annoyances. Nana was thoroughly disgusted and gave up the idea of going out. She was dragging herself wearily about the little drawing room when Labordette came up to tell her of a splendid chance of buying magnificent lace and in the course of his remarks casually let slip the information that Georges was dead. The announcement froze her.

"Zizi dead!" she cried.

And involuntarily her eyes sought the pink stain on the carpet, but it had vanished at last; passing footsteps had worn it away. Meanwhile Labordette entered into particulars. It was not exactly known how he died. Some spoke of a wound reopening, others of suicide. The lad had plunged, they said, into a tank at Les Fondettes. Nana kept repeating:

"Dead! Dead!"

She had been choking with grief since morning, and now she burst out sobbing and thus sought relief. Hers was an infinite sorrow: it overwhelmed her with its depth and immensity. Labordette wanted to comfort her as touching Georges, but she silenced him with a gesture and blurted out:

"It isn't only he; it's everything, everything. I'm very wretched. Oh yes, I know! They'll again be saying I'm a hussy. To think of the mother mourning down there and of the poor man who was groaning in front of my door this morning and of all the other people that are now ruined after running through all they had with me! That's it; punish Nana; punish the beastly thing! Oh, I've got a broad back! I can hear them as if I were actually there! That dirty wench who lies with everybody and cleans out some and drives others to death and causes a whole heap of people pain!"

She was obliged to pause, for tears choked her utterance, and in her anguish she flung herself athwart a divan and buried her face in a cushion. The miseries she felt to be around her, miseries of which she was the cause, overwhelmed her with a warm, continuous stream of self-pitying tears, and her voice failed as she uttered a little girl's broken plaint:

"Oh, I'm wretched! Oh, I'm wretched! I can't go on like this: it's choking me. It's too hard to be misunderstood and to see them all siding against you because they're stronger. However, when you've got nothing to reproach yourself with and your conscious is clear, why, then I say, 'I won't have it! I won't have it!'"

In her anger she began rebelling against circumstances, and getting up, she dried her eyes, and walked about in much agitation.

"I won't have it! They can say what they like, but it's not my fault! Am I a bad lot, eh? I give away all I've got; I wouldn't crush a fly! It's they who are bad! Yes, it's they! I never wanted to be horrid to them. And they came dangling after me, and today they're kicking the bucket and begging and going to ruin on purpose."

Then she paused in front of Labordette and tapped his shoulders.

"Look here," she said, "you were there all along; now speak the truth: did I urge them on? Weren't there always a dozen of 'em squabbling who could invent the dirtiest trick? They used to disgust me, they did! I did all I knew not to copy them: I was afraid to. Look here, I'll give you a single instance: they all wanted to marry me! A pretty notion, eh? Yes, dear boy, I could have been countess or baroness a dozen times over and more, if I'd consented. Well now, I refused because I was reasonable. Oh yes, I saved 'em some crimes and other foul acts! They'd have stolen, murdered, killed father and mother. I had only to say one word, and I didn't say it. You see what I've got for it today. There's Daguenet, for instance; I married that chap off! I made a position for the beggarly fellow after keeping him gratis for weeks! And I met him yesterday, and he looks the other way! Oh, get along, you swine! I'm less dirty than you!"

She had begun pacing about again, and now she brought her fist violently down on a round table.

"By God, it isn't fair! Society's all wrong. They come down on the women when it's the men who want you to do things. Yes, I can tell you this now: when I used to go with them—see? I didn't enjoy it; no, I didn't enjoy it one bit. It bored me, on my honor. Well then, I ask you whether I've got anything to do with it! Yes, they bored me to death! If it hadn't been for them and what they made of me, dear boy, I should be in a convent saying my prayers to the good God, for I've always had my share of religion. Dash it, after all, if they have dropped their money and their lives over it, what do I care? It's their fault. I've had nothing to do with it!"

"Certainly not," said Labordette with conviction.

Zoé ushered in Mignon, and Nana received him smilingly. She had cried a good deal, but it was all over now. Still glowing with enthusiasm, he complimented her on her installation, but she let him see that she had had enough of

her mansion and that now she had other projects and would sell everything up one of these days. Then as he excused himself for calling on the ground that he had come about a benefit performance in aid of old Bosc, who was tied to his armchair by paralysis, she expressed extreme pity and took two boxes. Meanwhile Zoé announced that the carriage was waiting for Madame, and she asked for her hat and as she tied the strings told them about poor, dear Satin's mishap, adding:

"I'm going to the hospital. Nobody ever loved me as she did. Oh, they're quite right when they accuse the men of heartlessness! Who knows? Perhaps I shan't see her alive. Never mind, I shall ask to see her: I want to give her a kiss."

Labordette and Mignon smiled, and as Nana was no longer melancholy she smiled too. Those two fellows didn't count; they could enter into her feelings. And they both stood and admired her in silent abstraction while she finished buttoning her gloves. She alone kept her feet amid the heaped-up riches of her mansion, while a whole generation of men lay stricken down before her. Like those antique monsters whose redoubtable domains were covered with skeletons, she rested her feet on human skulls. She was ringed round with catastrophes. There was the furious immolation of Vandeuves; the melancholy state of Foucarmont, who was lost in the China seas; the smashup of Steiner, who now had to live like an honest man; the satisfied idiocy of La Faloise, and the tragic shipwreck of the Muffats. Finally there was the white corpse of Georges, over which Philippe was now watching, for he had come out of prison but yesterday. She had finished her labor of ruin and death. The fly that had flown up from the ordure of the slums, bringing with it the leaven of social rotteness, had poisoned all these men by merely alighting on them. It was well done—it was just. She had avenged the beggars and the wastrels from whose caste she issued. And while, metaphorically speaking, her sex rose in a halo of glory and beamed over prostrate victims like a mounting sun shining brightly over a field of carnage, the actual woman remained as unconscious as a splendid animal, and in her ignorance of her mission was the good-natured courtesan to the last. She was still big; she was still plump; her health was excellent, her spirits capital. But this went for nothing now, for her house struck her as ridiculous. It was too small; it was full of furniture which got in her way. It was a wretched business, and the long and the short of the matter was she would have to make a fresh start. In fact, she was meditating something much better, and so she went off to kiss Satin for the last time. She was in all her finery and looked clean and solid and as brand new as if she had never seen service before.

CHAPTER XIV

NANA suddenly disappeared. It was a fresh plunge, an escapade, a flight into barbarous regions. Before her departure she had treated herself to a new sensation: she had held a sale and had made a clean sweep of everything—house,

furniture, jewelry, nay, even dresses and linen. Prices were cited—the five days' sale produced more than six hundred thousand francs. For the last time Paris had seen her in a fairy piece. It was called *Mélusine*, and it played at the Théâtre de la Gaîté, which the penniless Bordenave had taken out of sheer audacity. Here she again found herself in company with Prullière and Fontan. Her part was simply spectacular, but it was the great attraction of the piece, consisting, as it did, of three *poses plastiques*, each of which represented the same dumb and puissant fairy. Then one fine morning amid his grand success, when Bordenave, who was mad after advertisement, kept firing the Parisian imagination with colossal posters, it became known that she must have started for Cairo the previous day. She had simply had a few words with her manager. Something had been said which did not please her; the whole thing was the caprice of a woman who is too rich to let herself be annoyed. Besides, she had indulged an old infatuation, for she had long meditated visiting the Turks.

Months passed—she began to be forgotten. When her name was mentioned among the ladies and gentlemen, the strangest stories were told, and everybody gave the most contradictory and at the same time prodigious information. She had made a conquest of the viceroy; she was reigning, in the recesses of a palace, over two hundred slaves whose heads she now and then cut off for the sake of a little amusement. No, not at all! She had ruined herself with a great big nigger! A filthy passion this, which had left her wallowing without a chemise to her back in the crapulous debauchery of Cairo. A fortnight later much astonishment was produced when someone swore to having met her in Russia. A legend began to be formed: she was the mistress of a prince, and her diamonds were mentioned. All the women were soon acquainted with them from the current descriptions, but nobody could cite the precise source of all this information. There were finger rings, earrings, bracelets, a *revière* of phenomenal width, a queenly diadem surmounted by a central brilliant the size of one's thumb. In the retirement of those faraway countries she began to gleam forth as mysteriously as a gem-laden idol. People now mentioned her without laughing, for they were full of meditative respect for this fortune acquired among the barbarians.

One evening in July toward eight o'clock, Lucy, while getting out of her carriage in the Rue du Faubourg Saint-Honoré, noticed Caroline Héquet, who had come out on foot to order something at a neighboring tradesman's. Lucy called her and at once burst out with:

"Have you dined? Are you disengaged? Oh, then come with me, my dear. Nana's back."

The other got in at once, and Lucy continued:

"And you know, my dear, she may be dead while we're gossiping."

"Dead! What an idea!" cried Caroline in stupefaction. "And where is she? And what's it of?"

"At the Grand Hôtel, of smallpox. Oh, it's a long story!"

Lucy had bidden her coachman drive fast, and while the horses trotted rapidly along the Rue Royale and the boulevards, she told what had happened to Nana in jerky, breathless sentences.

"You can't imagine it. Nana plumps down out of Russia. I don't know why—some dispute with her prince. She leaves her traps at the station; she lands at her aunt's—you remember the old thing. Well, and then she finds her baby dying of smallpox. The baby dies next day, and she has a row with the aunt about some money she ought to have sent, of which the other one has never seen a sou. Seems the child died of that: in fact, it was neglected and badly cared for. Very well; Nana slopes, goes to a hotel, then meets Mignon just as she was thinking of her traps. She has all sorts of queer feelings, shivers, wants to be sick, and Mignon takes her back to her place and promises to look after her affairs. Isn't it odd, eh? Doesn't it all happen pat? But this is the best part of the story: Rose finds out about Nana's illness and gets indignant at the idea of her being alone in furnished apartments. So she rushes off, crying, to look after her. You remember how they used to detest one another—like regular furies! Well then, my dear, Rose has had Nana transported to the Grand Hôtel, so that she should, at any rate, die in a smart place, and now she's already passed three nights there and is free to die of it after. It's Labor-dette who told me all about it. Accordingly I wanted to see for myself—"

"Yes, yes," interrupted Caroline in great excitement. "We'll go up to her."

They had arrived at their destination. On the boulevard the coachman had had to rein in his horses amid a block of carriages and people on foot. During the day the Corps Législatif had voted for war, and now a crowd was streaming down all the streets, flowing along all the pavements, invading the middle of the roadway. Beyond the Madeleine the sun had set behind a blood-red cloud, which cast a reflection as of a great fire and set the lofty windows flaming. Twilight was falling, and the hour was oppressively melancholy, for now the avenues were darkening away into the distance but were not as yet dotted over by the bright sparks of the gas lamps. And among the marching crowds distant voices swelled and grew ever louder, and eyes gleamed from pale faces, while a great spreading wind of anguish and stupor set every head whirling.

"Here's Mignon," said Lucy. "He'll give us news."

Mignon was standing under the vast porch of the Grand Hôtel. He looked nervous and was gazing at the crowd. After Lucy's first few questions he grew impatient and cried out:

"How should I know? These last two days I haven't been able to tear Rose away from up there. It's getting stupid, when all's said, for her to be risking her life like that! She'll be charming if she gets over it, with holes in her face! It'll suit us to a tee!"

The idea that Rose might lose her beauty was exasperating him. He was giving up Nana in the most downright fashion, and he could not in the least understand these stupid feminine devotions. But Fauchery was crossing the boulevard, and he, too, came up anxiously and asked for news. The two men egged each other on. They addressed one another familiarly in these days.

"Always the same business, my sonny," declared Mignon. "You ought to go upstairs; you would force her to follow you."

"Come now, you're kind, you are!" said the journalist. "Why don't you go upstairs yourself?"

Then as Lucy began asking for Nana's number, they besought her to make Rose come down; otherwise they would end by getting angry.

Nevertheless, Lucy and Caroline did not go up at once. They had caught sight of Fontan strolling about with his hands in his pockets and greatly amused by the quaint expressions of the mob. When he became aware that Nana was lying ill upstairs he affected sentiment and remarked:

"The poor girl! I'll go and shake her by the hand. What's the matter with her, eh?"

"Smallpox," replied Mignon.

The actor had already taken a step or two in the direction of the court, but he came back and simply murmured with a shiver:

"Oh, damn it!"

The smallpox was no joke. Fontan had been near having it when he was five years old, while Mignon gave them an account of one of his nieces who had died of it. As to Fauchery, he could speak of it from personal experience, for he still bore marks of it in the shape of three little lumps at the base of his nose, which he showed them. And when Mignon again egged him on to the ascent, on the pretext that you never had it twice, he violently combated this theory and with infinite abuse of the doctors instanced various cases. But Lucy and Caroline interrupted them, for the growing multitude filled them with astonishment.

"Just look! Just look what a lot of people!" The night was deepening, and in the distance the gas lamps were being lit one by one. Meanwhile interested spectators became visible at windows, while under the trees the human flood grew every minute more dense, till it ran in one enormous stream from the Madeleine to the Bastille. Carriages rolled slowly along. A roaring sound went up from this compact and as yet inarticulate mass. Each member of it had come out, impelled by the desire to form a crowd, and was now trampling along, steeping himself in the pervading fever. But a great movement caused the mob to flow asunder. Among the jostling, scattering groups a band of men in workmen's caps and white blouses had come in sight, uttering a rhythmic cry which suggested the beat of hammers upon an anvil.

"To Ber-lin! To Ber-lin! To Ber-lin!" And the crowd stared in gloomy distrust yet felt themselves already possessed and inspired by heroic imaginings, as though a military band were passing.

"Oh yes, go and get your throats cut!" muttered Mignon, overcome by an access of philosophy.

But Fontan thought it very fine, indeed, and spoke of enlisting. When the enemy was on the frontier all citizens ought to rise up in defense of the fatherland! And with that he assumed an attitude suggestive of Bonaparte at Austerlitz.

"Look here, are you coming up with us?" Lucy asked him.

"Oh dear, no! To catch something horrid?" he said.

On a bench in front of the Grand Hôtel a man sat hiding his face in a handkerchief. On arriving Fauchery had indicated him to Mignon with a wink of the eye. Well, he was still there; yes, he was always there. And the jour-

nalist detained the two women also in order to point him out to them. When the man lifted his head they recognized him; an exclamation escaped them. It was the Count Muffat, and he was giving an upward glance at one of the windows.

"You know, he's been waiting there since this morning," Mignon informed them. "I saw him at six o'clock, and he hasn't moved since. Directly Labordette spoke about it he came there with his handkerchief up to his face. Every half-hour he comes dragging himself to where we're standing to ask if the person upstairs is doing better, and then he goes back and sits down. Hang it, that room isn't healthy! It's all very well being fond of people, but one doesn't want to kick the bucket."

The count sat with uplifted eyes and did not seem conscious of what was going on around him. Doubtless he was ignorant of the declaration of war, and he neither felt nor saw the crowd.

"Look, here he comes!" said Fauchery. "Now you'll see."

The count had, in fact, quitted his bench and was entering the lofty porch. But the porter, who was getting to know his face at last, did not give him time to put his question. He said sharply:

"She's dead, monsieur, this very minute."

Nana dead! It was a blow to them all. Without a word Muffat had gone back to the bench, his face still buried in his handkerchief. The others burst into exclamations, but they were cut short, for a fresh band passed by, howling, "*A Berlin! A Berlin! A Berlin!*" Nana dead! Hang it, and such a fine girl too! Mignon sighed and looked relieved, for at last Rose would come down. A chill fell on the company. Fontan, meditating a tragic role, had assumed a look of woe and was drawing down the corners of his mouth and rolling his eyes askance, while Fauchery chewed his cigar nervously, for despite his cheap journalistic chaff he was really touched. Nevertheless, the two women continued to give vent to their feelings of surprise. The last time Lucy had seen her was at the Gaîté; Blanche, too, had seen her in *Mélusine*. Oh, how stunning it was, my dear, when she appeared in the depths of the crystal grot! The gentlemen remembered the occasion perfectly. Fontan had played the Prince Cocorico. And their memories once stirred up, they launched into interminable particulars. How ripping she looked with that rich coloring of hers in the crystal grot! Didn't she, now? She didn't say a word: the authors had even deprived her of a line or two, because it was superfluous. No, never a word! It was grander that way, and she drove her public wild by simply showing herself. You wouldn't find another body like hers! Such shoulders as she had, and such legs and such a figure! Strange that she should be dead! You know, above her tights she had nothing on but a golden girdle which hardly concealed her behind and in front. All round her the grotto, which was entirely of glass, shone like day. Cascades of diamonds were flowing down; strings of brilliant pearls glistened among the stalactites in the vault overhead, and amid the transparent atmosphere and flowing fountain water, which was crossed by a wide ray of electric light, she gleamed like the sun with that flamelike skin and hair of hers. Paris would always picture her thus—would see

her shining high up among crystal glass like the good God Himself. No, it was too stupid to let herself die under such conditions! She must be looking pretty by this time in that room up there!

"And what a lot of pleasures bloody well wasted!" said Mignon in melancholy tones, as became a man who did not like to see good and useful things lost.

He sounded Lucy and Caroline in order to find out if they were going up after all. Of course they were going up; their curiosity had increased. Just then Blanche arrived, out of breath and much exasperated at the way the crowds were blocking the pavement, and when she heard the news there was a fresh outburst of exclamations, and with a great rustling of skirts the ladies moved toward the staircase. Mignon followed them, crying out:

"Tell Rose that I'm waiting for her. She'll come at once, eh?"

"They do not exactly know whether the contagion is to be feared at the beginning or near the end," Fontan was explaining to Fauchery. "A medical I know was assuring me that the hours immediately following death are particularly dangerous. There are miasmatic exhalations then. Ah, but I do regret this sudden ending; I should have been so glad to shake hands with her for the last time."

"What good would it do you now?" said the journalist.

"Yes, what good?" the two others repeated.

The crowd was still on the increase. In the bright light thrown from shop-windows and beneath the wavering glare of the gas two living streams were distinguishable as they flowed along the pavement, innumerable hats apparently drifting on their surface. At that hour the popular fever was gaining ground rapidly, and people were flinging themselves in the wake of the bands of men in blouses. A constant forward movement seemed to sweep the roadway, and the cry kept recurring; obstinately, abruptly, there rang from thousands of throats:

"A Berlin! A Berlin! A Berlin!"

The room on the fourth floor upstairs cost twelve francs a day, since Rose had wanted something decent and yet not luxurious, for sumptuousness is not necessary when one is suffering. Hung with Louis XIII cretonne, which was adorned with a pattern of large flowers, the room was furnished with the mahogany commonly found in hotels. On the floor there was a red carpet variegated with black foliage. Heavy silence reigned save for an occasional whispering sound caused by voices in the corridor.

"I assure you we're lost. The waiter told us to turn to the right. What a barrack of a house!"

"Wait a bit; we must have a look. Room number 401; room number 401!"

"Oh, it's this way: 405, 403. We ought to be there. Ah, at last, 401! This way! Hush now, hush!"

The voices were silent. Then there was a slight coughing and a moment or so of mental preparation. Then the door opened slowly, and Lucy entered, followed by Caroline and Blanche. But they stopped directly; there were

already five women in the room; Gaga was lying back in the solitary armchair, which was a red velvet Voltaire. In front of the fireplace Simonne and Clarisse were now standing talking to Léa de Horn, who was seated, while by the bed, to the left of the door, Rose Mignon, perched on the edge of a chest, sat gazing fixedly at the body where it lay hidden in the shadow of the curtains. All the others had their hats and gloves on and looked as if they were paying a call: she alone sat there with bare hands and untidy hair and cheeks rendered pale by three nights of watching. She felt stupid in the face of this sudden death, and her eyes were swollen with weeping. A shaded lamp standing on the corner of the chest of drawers threw a bright flood of light over Gaga.

"What a sad misfortune, is it not?" whispered Lucy as she shook hands with Rose. "We wanted to bid her good-by."

And she turned round and tried to catch sight of her, but the lamp was too far off, and she did not dare bring it nearer. On the bed lay stretched a gray mass, but only the ruddy chignon was distinguishable and a pale blotch which might be the face. Lucy added:

"I never saw her since that time at the Gaîté, when she was at the end of the grotto."

At this Rose awoke from her stupor and smiled as she said:

"Ah, she's changed; she's changed."

Then she once more lapsed into contemplation and neither moved nor spoke. Perhaps they would be able to look at her presently! And with that the three women joined the others in front of the fireplace. Simonne and Clarisse were discussing the dead woman's diamonds in low tones. Well, did they really exist—those diamonds? Nobody had seen them; it must be a bit of humbug. But Léa de Horn knew someone who knew all about them. Oh, they were monster stones! Besides, they weren't all; she had brought back lots of other precious property from Russia—embroidered stuffs, for instance, valuable knickknacks, a gold dinner service, nay, even furniture. "Yes, my dear, fifty-two boxes, enormous cases some of them, three truckloads of them!" They were all lying at the station. "Wasn't it hard lines, eh?—to die without even having time to unpack one's traps?" Then she had a lot of tin, besides—something like a million! Lucy asked who was going to inherit it all. Oh, distant relations—the aunt, without doubt! It would be a pretty surprise for that old body. She knew nothing about it yet, for the sick woman had obstinately refused to let them warn her, for she still owed her a grudge over her little boy's death. Thereupon they were all moved to pity about the little boy, and they remembered seeing him at the races. Oh, it was a wretchedly sickly baby; it looked so old and so sad. In fact, it was one of those poor brats who never asked to be born!

"He's happier under the ground," said Blanche.

"Bah, and so's she!" added Caroline. "Life isn't so funny!"

In that gloomy room melancholy ideas began to take possession of their imaginations. They felt frightened. It was silly to stand talking so long, but a longing to see her kept them rooted to the spot. It was very hot—the lamp glass threw a round, moonlike patch of light upon the ceiling, but the rest of

the room was drowned in steamy darkness. Under the bed a deep plate full of phenol exhaled an insipid smell. And every few moments tiny gusts of wind swelled the window curtains. The window opened on the boulevard, whence rose a dull roaring sound.

"Did she suffer much?" asked Lucy, who was absorbed in contemplation of the clock, the design of which represented the three Graces as nude young women, smiling like opera dancers.

Gaga seemed to wake up.

"My word, yes! I was present when she died. I promise you it was not at all pleasant to see. Why, she was taken with a shuddering fit—"

But she was unable to proceed with her explanation, for a cry arose outside:

"A Berlin! A Berlin! A Berlin!"

And Lucy, who felt suffocated, flung wide the window and leaned upon the sill. It was pleasant there; the air came fresh from the starry sky. Opposite her the windows were all aglow with light, and the gas sent dancing reflections over the gilt lettering of the shop signs.

Beneath these, again, a most amusing scene presented itself. The streams of people were discernible rolling torrentwise along the sidewalks and in the roadway, where there was a confused procession of carriages. Everywhere there were vast moving shadows in which lanterns and lampposts gleamed like sparks. But the band which now came roaring by carried torches, and a red glow streamed down from the direction of the Madeleine, crossed the mob like a trail of fire and spread out over the heads in the distance like a vivid reflection of a burning house. Lucy called Blanche and Caroline, forgetting where she was and shouting:

"Do come! You get a capital view from this window!"

They all three leaned out, greatly interested. The trees got in their way, and occasionally the torches disappeared under the foliage. They tried to catch a glimpse of the men of their own party below, but a protruding balcony hid the door, and they could only make out Count Muffat, who looked like a dark parcel thrown down on the bench where he sat. He was still burying his face in his handkerchief. A carriage had stopped in front, and yet another woman hurried up, in whom Lucy recognized Maria Blond. She was not alone; a stout man got down after her.

"It's that thief of a Steiner," said Caroline. "How is it they haven't sent him back to Cologne yet? I want to see how he looks when he comes in."

They turned round, but when after the lapse of ten minutes Maria Blond appeared, she was alone. She had twice mistaken the staircase. And when Lucy, in some astonishment, questioned her:

"What, he?" she said. "My dear, don't you go fancying that he'll come upstairs! It's a great wonder he's escorted me as far as the door. There are nearly a dozen of them smoking cigars."

As a matter of fact, all the gentlemen were meeting downstairs. They had come strolling thither in order to have a look at the boulevards, and they hailed one another and commented loudly on that poor girl's death. Then they began discussing politics and strategy. Bordenave, Daguenet, Labordette,

Pruilliére and others, besides, had swollen the group, and now they were all listening to Fontan, who was explaining his plan for taking Berlin within a week.

Meanwhile Maria Blond was touched as she stood by the bedside and murmured, as the others had done before her:

"Poor pet! The last time I saw her was in the grotto at the Gaîté."

"Ah, she's changed; she's changed!" Rose Mignon repeated with a smile of gloomiest dejection.

Two more women arrived. These were Tatan Néné and Louise Violaine. They had been wandering about the Grand Hôtel for twenty minutes past, bandied from waiter to waiter, and had ascended and descended more than thirty flights of stairs amid a perfect stampede of travelers who were hurrying to leave Paris amid the panic caused by the war and the excitement on the boulevards. Accordingly they just dropped down on chairs when they came in, for they were too tired to think about the dead. At that moment a loud noise came from the room next door, where people were pushing trunks about and striking against furniture to an accompaniment of strident, outlandish syllables. It was a young Austrian couple, and Gaga told how during her agony the neighbors had played a game of catch as catch can and how, as only an unused door divided the two rooms, they had heard them laughing and kissing when one or the other was caught.

"Come, it's time we were off," said Clarisse. "We shan't bring her to life again. Are you coming, Simonne?"

They all looked at the bed out of the corners of their eyes, but they did not budge an inch. Nevertheless, they began getting ready and gave their skirts various little pats. Lucy was again leaning out of window. She was alone now, and a sorrowful feeling began little by little to overpower her, as though an intense wave of melancholy had mounted up from the howling mob. Torches still kept passing, shaking out clouds of sparks, and far away in the distance the various bands stretched into the shadows, surging unquietly to and fro like flocks being driven to the slaughterhouse at night. A dizzy feeling emanated from these confused masses as the human flood rolled them along—a dizzy feeling, a sense of terror and all the pity of the massacres to come. The people were going wild; their voices broke; they were drunk with a fever of excitement which sent them rushing toward the unknown "out there" beyond the dark wall of the horizon.

"A Berlin! A Berlin! A Berlin!"

Lucy turned round. She leaned her back against the window, and her face was very pale.

"Good God! What's to become of us?"

The ladies shook their heads. They were serious and very anxious about the turn events were taking.

"For my part," said Caroline Héquet in her decisive way, "I start for London the day after tomorrow. Mamma's already over there getting a house ready for me. I'm certainly not going to let myself be massacred in Paris."

Her mother, as became a prudent woman, had invested all her daughters'

money in foreign lands. One never knows how a war may end! But Maria Blond grew vexed at this. She was a patriot and spoke of following the army.

"There's a coward for you! Yes, if they wanted me I should put on man's clothes just to have a good shot at those pigs of Prussians! And if we all die after? What of that? Our wretched skins aren't so valuable!"

Blanche de Sivry was exasperated.

"Please don't speak ill of the Prussians! They are just like other men, and they're not always running after the women, like your Frenchmen. They've just expelled the little Prussian who was with me. He was an awfully rich fellow and so gentle: he couldn't have hurt a soul. It's disgraceful; I'm ruined by it. And, you know, you mustn't say a word or I go and find him out in Germany!"

After that, while the two were at loggerheads, Gaga began murmuring in dolorous tones:

"It's all over with me; my luck's always bad. It's only a week ago that I finished paying for my little house at Juvisy. Ah, God knows what trouble it cost me! I had to go to Lili for help! And now here's the war declared, and the Prussians 'll come and they'll burn everything. How am I to begin again at my time of life, I should like to know?"

"Bah!" said Clarisse. "I don't care a damn about it. I shall always find what I want."

"Certainly you will," added Simonne. "It 'll be a joke. Perhaps, after all, it 'll be good biz."

And her smile hinted what she thought. Tatan Néné and Louise Violaine were of her opinion. The former told them that she had enjoyed the most roaring jolly good times with soldiers. Oh, they were good fellows and would have done any mortal thing for the girls. But as the ladies had raised their voices unduly Rose Mignon, still sitting on the chest by the bed, silenced them with a softly whispered "Hush!" They stood quite still at this and glanced obliquely toward the dead woman, as though this request for silence had emanated from the very shadows of the curtains. In the heavy, peaceful stillness which ensued, a void, deathly stillness which made them conscious of the stiff dead body lying stretched close by them, the cries of the mob burst forth:

"A Berlin! A Berlin! A Berlin!"

But soon they forgot. Léa de Horn, who had a political salon where former ministers of Louis Philippe were wont to indulge in delicate epigrams, shrugged her shoulders and continued the conversation in a low tone:

"What a mistake this war is! What a bloodthirsty piece of stupidity!"

At this Lucy forthwith took up the cudgels for the empire. She had been the mistress of a prince of the imperial house, and its defense became a point of family honor with her.

"Do leave them alone, my dear. We couldn't let ourselves be further insulted! Why, this war concerns the honor of France. Oh, you know I don't say that because of the prince. He *was* just mean! Just imagine, at night when he was going to bed he hid his gold in his boots, and when we played at

beziqne he used beans, because one day I pounced down on the stakes for fun. But that doesn't prevent my being fair. The emperor was right."

Léa shook her head with an air of superiority, as became a woman who was repeating the opinions of important personages. Then raising her voice:

"This is the end of all things. They're out of their minds at the Tuileries. France ought to have driven them out yesterday. Don't you see?"

They all violently interrupted her. What was up with her? Was she mad about the emperor? Were people not happy? Was business doing badly? Paris would never enjoy itself so thoroughly again.

Gaga was beside herself; she woke up and was very indignant.

"Be quiet! It's idiotic! You don't know what you're saying. I—I've seen Louis Philippe's reign: it was full of beggars and misers, my dear. And then came '48! Oh, it was a pretty disgusting business was their republic! After February I was simply dying of starvation—yes, I, Gaga. Oh, if only you'd been through it all you would go down on your knees before the emperor, for he's been a father to us; yes, a father to us."

She had to be soothed but continued with pious fervor:

"O my God, do Thy best to give the emperor the victory. Preserve the empire to us!"

They all repeated this aspiration, and Blanche confessed that she burned candles for the emperor. Caroline had been smitten by him and for two whole months had walked where he was likely to pass but had failed to attract his attention. And with that the others burst forth into furious denunciations of the Republicans and talked of exterminating them on the frontiers so that Napoleon III, after having beaten the enemy, might reign peacefully amid universal enjoyment.

"That dirty Bismarck—there's another cad for you!" Maria Blond remarked.

"To think that I should have known him!" cried Simonne. "If only I could have foreseen, I'm the one that would have put some poison in his glass."

But Blanche, on whose heart the expulsion of her Prussian still weighed, ventured to defend Bismarck. Perhaps he wasn't such a bad sort. To every man his trade!

"You know," she added, "he adores women."

"What the hell has that got to do with us?" said Clarisse. "We don't want to cuddle him, eh?"

"There's always too many men of that sort!" declared Louise Violaine gravely. "It's better to do without 'em than to mix oneself up with such monsters!"

And the discussion continued, and they stripped Bismarck, and, in her Bonapartist zeal, each of them gave him a sounding kick, while Tatan Néné kept saying:

"Bismarck! Why, they've simply driven me crazy with the chap! Oh, I hate him! I didn't know that there Bismarck! One can't know everybody."

"Never mind," said Léa de Horn by way of conclusion, "that Bismarck will give us a jolly good threshing."

But she could not continue. The ladies were all down on her at once. Eh, what? A threshing? It was Bismarck they were going to escort home with blows from the butt ends of their muskets. What was this bad Frenchwoman going to say next?

"Hush," whispered Rose, for so much noise hurt her.

The cold influence of the corpse once more overcame them, and they all paused together. They were embarrassed; the dead woman was before them again; a dull thread of coming ill possessed them. On the boulevard the cry was passing, hoarse and wild:

"A Berlin! A Berlin! A Berlin!"

Presently, when they were making up their minds to go, a voice was heard calling from the passage:

"Rose! Rose!"

Gaga opened the door in astonishment and disappeared for a moment. When she returned:

"My dear," she said, "it's Fauchery. He's out there at the end of the corridor. He won't come any further, and he's beside himself because you still stay near that body."

Mignon had at last succeeded in urging the journalist upstairs. Lucy, who was still at the window, leaned out and caught sight of the gentlemen out on the pavement. They were looking up, making energetic signals to her. Mignon was shaking his fists in exasperation, and Steiner, Fontan, Bordenave and the rest were stretching out their arms with looks of anxious reproach, while Daguenet simply stood smoking a cigar with his hands behind his back, so as not to compromise himself.

"It's true, dear," said Lucy, leaving the window open; "I promised to make you come down. They're all calling us now."

Rose slowly and painfully left the chest.

"I'm coming down; I'm coming down," she whispered. "It's very certain she no longer needs me. They're going to send in a Sister of Mercy."

And she turned round, searching for her hat and shawl. Mechanically she filled a basin of water on the toilet table and while washing her hands and face continued:

"I don't know! It's been a great blow to me. We used scarcely to be nice to one another. Ah well! You see I'm quite silly over it now. Oh! I've got all sorts of strange ideas—I want to die myself—I feel the end of the world's coming. Yes, I need air."

The corpse was beginning to poison the atmosphere of the room. And after long heedlessness there ensued a panic.

"Let's be off; let's be off, my little pets!" Gaga kept saying. "It isn't wholesome here."

They went briskly out, casting a last glance at the bed as they passed it. But while Lucy, Blanche and Caroline still remained behind, Rose gave a final look round, for she wanted to leave the room in order. She drew a curtain across the window, and then it occurred to her that the lamp was not the proper thing and that a taper should take its place. So she lit one of the copper

candelabra on the chimney piece and placed it on the night table beside the corpse. A brilliant light suddenly illumined the dead woman's face. The women were horror-struck. They shuddered and escaped.

"Ah, she's changed; she's changed!" murmured Rose Mignon, who was the last to remain.

She went away; she shut the door. Nana was left alone with upturned face in the light cast by the candle. She was fruit of the charnel house, a heap of matter and blood, a shovelful of corrupted flesh thrown down on the pillow. The pustules had invaded the whole of the face, so that each touched its neighbor. Fading and sunken, they had assumed the grayish hue of mud; and on that formless pulp, where the features had ceased to be traceable, they already resembled some decaying damp from the grave. One eye, the left eye, had completely foundered among bubbling purulence, and the other, which remained half open, looked like a deep, black, ruinous hole. The nose was still suppurating. Quite a reddish crush was peeling from one of the cheeks and invading the mouth, which it distorted into a horrible grin. And over this loathsome and grotesque mask of death the hair, the beautiful hair, still blazed like sunlight and flowed downward in rippling gold. Venus was rotting. It seemed as though the poison she had assimilated in the gutters and on the carrion tolerated by the roadside, the leaven with which she had poisoned a whole people, had but now remounted to her face and turned it to corruption.

The room was empty. A great despairing breath came up from the boulevard and swelled the curtain.

"A Berlin! A Berlin! A Berlin!"

THE MILLER'S DAUGHTER

CHAPTER I

THE BETROTHAL

PÈRE MERLIER'S mill, one beautiful summer evening, was arranged for a grand fete. In the courtyard were three tables, placed end to end, which awaited the guests. Everyone knew that Françoise, Merlier's daughter, was that night to be betrothed to Dominique, a young man who was accused of idleness but whom the fair sex for three leagues around gazed at with sparkling eyes, such a fine appearance had he.

Père Merlier's mill was pleasing to look upon. It stood exactly in the center of Rocreuse, where the highway made an elbow. The village had but one street, with two rows of huts, a row on each side of the road; but at the elbow meadows spread out, and huge trees which lined the banks of the Morelle covered the extremity of the valley with lordly shade. There was not, in all Lorraine, a corner of nature more adorable. To the right and to the left thick woods, centenarian forests, towered up from gentle slopes, filling the horizon with a sea of verdure, while toward the south the plain stretched away, of marvelous fertility, displaying as far as the eye could reach patches of ground divided by green hedges. But what constituted the special charm of Rocreuse was the coolness of that cut of verdure in the most sultry days of July and August. The Morelle descended from the forests of Gagny and seemed to have gathered the cold from the foliage beneath which it flowed for leagues; it brought with it the murmuring sounds, the icy and concentrated shade of the woods. And it was not the sole source of coolness: all sorts of flowing streams gurgled through the forest; at each step springs bubbled up; one felt, on following the narrow pathways, that there must exist subterranean lakes which pierced through beneath the moss and availed themselves of the smallest crevices at the feet of trees or between the rocks to burst forth in crystalline fountains. The whispering voices of these brooks were so numerous and so loud that they drowned the song of the bullfinches. It was like some enchanted park with cascades falling from every portion.

Below the meadows were damp. Gigantic chestnut trees cast dark shadows. On the borders of the meadows long hedges of poplars exhibited in lines their rustling branches. Two avenues of enormous plane trees stretched across the fields toward the ancient Château de Gagny, then a mass of ruins. In this constantly watered district the grass grew to an extraordinary height. It resembled a garden between two wooded hills, a natural garden, of which the meadows were the lawns, the giant trees marking the colossal flower beds. When the sun's rays at noon poured straight downward the shadows assumed a bluish tint; scorched grass slept in the heat, while an icy shiver passed beneath the foliage.

And there it was that Père Merlier's mill enlivened with its ticktack a corner of wild verdure. The structure, built of plaster and planks, seemed as old as the world. It dipped partially in the Morelle, which rounded at that

point into a transparent basin. A sluice had been made, and the water fell from a height of several meters upon the mill wheel, which cracked as it turned, with the asthmatic cough of a faithful servant grown old in the house. When Père Merlier was advised to change it he shook his head, saying that a new wheel would be lazier and would not so well understand the work, and he mended the old one with whatever he could put his hands on: cask staves, rusty iron, zinc and lead. The wheel appeared gayer than ever for it, with its profile grown odd, all plumed with grass and moss. When the water beat upon it with its silvery flood it was covered with pearls; its strange carcass wore a sparkling attire of necklaces of mother-of-pearl.

The part of the mill which dipped in the Morelle had the air of a barbaric arch stranded there. A full half of the structure was built on piles. The water flowed beneath the floor, and deep places were there, renowned throughout the district for the enormous eels and crayfish caught in them. Below the fall the basin was as clear as a mirror, and when the wheel did not cover it with foam schools of huge fish could be seen swimming with the slowness of a squadron. Broken steps led down to the river near a stake to which a boat was moored. A wooden gallery passed above the wheel. Windows opened, pierced irregularly. It was a pell-mell of corners, of little walls, of constructions added too late, of beams and of roofs, which gave the mill the aspect of an old, dismantled citadel. But ivy had grown; all sorts of clinging plants stopped the too-wide chinks and threw a green cloak over the ancient building. The young ladies who passed by sketched Père Merlier's mill in their albums.

On the side facing the highway the structure was more solid. A stone gateway opened upon the wide courtyard, which was bordered to the right and to the left by sheds and stables. Beside a well an immense elm covered half the courtyard with its shadow. In the background the building displayed the four windows of its second story, surmounted by a pigeon house. Père Merlier's sole vanity was to have this front plastered every ten years. It had just received a new coating and dazzled the village when the sun shone on it at noon.

For twenty years Père Merlier had been mayor of Rocreuse. He was esteemed for the fortune he had acquired. His wealth was estimated at something like eighty thousand francs, amassed sou by sou. When he married Madeleine Guillard, who brought him the mill as her dowry, he possessed only his two arms. But Madeleine never repented of her choice, so briskly did he manage the business. Now his wife was dead, and he remained a widower with his daughter Françoise. Certainly he might have rested, allowed the mill wheel to slumber in the moss, but that would have been too dull for him, and in his eyes the building would have seemed dead. He toiled on for pleasure.

Père Merlier was a tall old man with a long, still face, who never laughed but who possessed, notwithstanding, a very gay heart. He had been chosen mayor because of his money and also on account of the imposing air he could assume during a marriage ceremony.

Françoise Merlier was just eighteen. She did not pass for one of the handsome girls of the district, as she was not robust. Up to her fifteenth year she had been even ugly.

The Rocreuse people had not been able to understand why the daughter of Père and Mère Merlier, both of whom had always enjoyed excellent health, grew ill and with an air of regret. But at fifteen, though yet delicate, her little face became one of the prettiest in the world. She had black hair, black eyes, and was as rosy as a peach; her lips constantly wore a smile; there were dimples in her cheeks, and her fair forehead seemed crowned with sunlight. Although not considered robust in the district, she was far from thin; the idea was simply that she could not lift a sack of grain, but she would become plump as she grew older—she would eventually be as round and dainty as a quail. Her father's long periods of silence had made her thoughtful very young. If she smiled constantly it was to please others. By nature she was serious.

Of course all the young men of the district paid court to her, more on account of her *écus* than her pretty ways. At last she made a choice which scandalized the community.

On the opposite bank of the Morelle lived a tall youth named Dominique Penquer. He did not belong to Rocreuse. Ten years before he had arrived from Belgium as the heir of his uncle, who had left him a small property upon the very border of the forest of Gagny, just opposite the mill, a few gunshots distant. He had come to sell this property, he said, and return home. But the district charmed him, it appeared, for he did not quit it. He was seen cultivating his little field, gathering a few vegetables upon which he subsisted. He fished and hunted; many times the forest guards nearly caught him and were on the point of drawing up *procès-verbaux* against him. This free existence, the resources of which the peasants could not clearly discover, at length gave him a bad reputation. He was vaguely styled a poacher. At any rate, he was lazy, for he was often found asleep on the grass when he should have been at work. The hut he inhabited beneath the last trees on the edge of the forest did not seem at all like the dwelling of an honest young fellow. If he had had dealings with the wolves of the ruins of Gagny the old women would not have been the least bit surprised. Nevertheless, the young girls sometimes risked defending him, for this doubtful man was superb; supple and tall as a poplar, he had a very white skin, with flaxen hair and beard which gleamed like gold in the sun.

One fine morning Françoise declared to Père Merlier that she loved Dominique and would never wed any other man.

It may well be imagined what a blow this was to Père Merlier. He said nothing, according to his custom, but his face grew thoughtful and his internal gaiety no longer sparkled in his eyes. He looked gruff for a week. Françoise also was exceedingly grave. What tormented Père Merlier was to find out how this rogue of a poacher had managed to fascinate his daughter. Dominique had never visited the mill. The miller watched and saw the gallant on the other side of the Morelle, stretched out upon the grass and feigning to be

asleep. Françoise could see him from her chamber window. Everything was plain: they had fallen in love by casting sheep's eyes at each other over the mill wheel.

Another week went by. Françoise became more and more grave. Père Merlier still said nothing. Then one evening he himself silently brought in Dominique. Françoise at that moment was setting the table. She did not seem astonished; she contented herself with putting on an additional plate, knife and fork, but the little dimples were again seen in her cheeks, and her smile reappeared. That morning Père Merlier had sought out Dominique in his hut on the border of the wood.

There the two men had talked for three hours with doors and windows closed. What was the purport of their conversation no one ever knew. Certain it was, however, that Père Merlier, on taking his departure, already called Dominique his son-in-law. Without doubt the old man had found the youth he had gone to seek a worthy youth in the lazy fellow who stretched himself out upon the grass to make the girls fall in love with him.

All Rocreuse clamored. The women at the doors had plenty to say on the subject of the folly of Père Merlier, who had thus introduced a reprobate into his house. The miller let people talk on. Perhaps he remembered his own marriage. He was without a sou when he wedded Madeleine and her mill; this, however, had not prevented him from making a good husband. Besides, Dominique cut short the gossip by going so vigorously to work that all the district was amazed. The miller's assistant had just been drawn to serve as a soldier, and Dominique would not suffer another to be engaged. He carried the sacks, drove the cart, fought with the old mill wheel when it refused to turn, and all this with such good will that people came to see him out of curiosity. Père Merlier had his silent laugh. He was excessively proud of having formed a correct estimate of this youth. There is nothing like love to give courage to young folks. Amid all these heavy labors Françoise and Dominique adored each other. They did not indulge in lovers' talks, but there was a smiling gentleness in their glances.

Up to that time Père Merlier had not spoken a single word on the subject of marriage, and they respected this silence, awaiting the old man's will. Finally one day toward the middle of July he caused three tables to be placed in the courtyard, beneath the great elm, and invited his friends of Rocreuse to come in the evening and drink a glass of wine with him.

When the courtyard was full and all had their glasses in their hands, Père Merlier raised his very high and said:

"I have the pleasure to announce to you that Françoise will wed this young fellow here in a month, on Saint Louis's Day."

Then they drank noisily. Everybody smiled. But Père Merlier, again lifting his voice, exclaimed:

"Dominique, embrace your fiancée. It is your right."

They embraced, blushing to the tips of their ears, while all the guests laughed joyously. It was a genuine fete. They emptied a small cask of wine. Then when all were gone but intimate friends the conversation was carried

on without noise. The night had fallen, a starry and cloudless night. Dominique and Françoise, seated side by side on a bench, said nothing.

An old peasant spoke of the war the emperor had declared against Prussia. All the village lads had already departed. On the preceding day troops had again passed through the place. There was going to be hard fighting.

"Bah!" said Père Merlier with the selfishness of a happy man. "Dominique is a foreigner; he will not go to the war. And if the Prussians come here he will be on hand to defend his wife!"

The idea that the Prussians might come there seemed a good joke. They were going to receive a sound whipping, and the affair would soon be over.

"I have already seen them; I have already seen them," repeated the old peasant in a hollow voice.

There was silence. Then they drank again. Françoise and Dominique had heard nothing; they had gently taken each other by the hand behind the bench, so that nobody could see them, and it seemed so delightful that they remained where they were, their eyes plunged into the depths of the shadows.

What a warm and superb night it was! The village slumbered on both edges of the white highway in infantile quietude. From time to time was heard the crowing of some chanticler aroused too soon. From the huge wood near by came long breaths, which passed over the roofs like caresses. The meadows, with their dark shadows, assumed a mysterious and dreamy majesty, while all the springs, all the flowing waters which gurgled in the darkness, seemed to be the cool and rhythmical respiration of the sleeping country. Occasionally the ancient mill wheel, lost in a doze, appeared to dream like those old watchdogs that bark while snoring; it cracked; it talked to itself, rocked by the fall of the Morelle, the surface of which gave forth the musical and continuous sound of an organ pipe. Never had more profound peace descended upon a happier corner of nature.

CHAPTER II

THE ATTACK ON THE MILL

A MONTH LATER, on the day preceding that of Saint Louis, Rocreuse was in a state of terror. The Prussians had beaten the emperor and were advancing by forced marches toward the village. For a week past people who hurried along the highway had been announcing them thus: "They are at Lormière—they are at Novelles!" And on hearing that they were drawing near so rapidly, Rocreuse every morning expected to see them descend from the wood of Gagny. They did not come, however, and that increased the fright. They would surely fall upon the village during the night and slaughter everybody.

That morning, a little before sunrise, there was an alarm. The inhabitants were awakened by the loud tramp of men on the highway. The women were already on their knees, making the sign of the cross, when some of the people, peering cautiously through the partially opened windows, recognized the red pantaloons. It was a French detachment. The captain immediately asked for

the mayor of the district and remained at the mill after having talked with Père Merlier.

The sun rose gaily that morning. It would be hot at noon. Over the wood floated a golden brightness, while in the distance white vapors arose from the meadows. The neat and pretty village awoke amid the fresh air, and the country, with its river and its springs, had the moist sweetness of a bouquet. But that beautiful day caused nobody to smile. The captain was seen to take a turn around the mill, examine the neighboring houses, pass to the other side of the Morelle and from there study the district with a field glass; Père Merlier, who accompanied him, seemed to be giving him explanations. Then the captain posted soldiers behind the walls, behind the trees and in the ditches. The main body of the detachment encamped in the courtyard of the mill. Was there going to be a battle? When Père Merlier returned he was questioned. He nodded his head without speaking. Yes, there was going to be a battle!

Françoise and Dominique were in the courtyard; they looked at him. At last he took his pipe from his mouth and said:

"Ah, my poor young ones, you cannot get married tomorrow!"

Dominique, his lips pressed together, with an angry frown on his forehead, at times raised himself on tiptoe and fixed his eyes upon the wood of Gagny, as if he wished to see the Prussians arrive. Françoise, very pale and serious, came and went, furnishing the soldiers with what they needed. The troops were making soup in a corner of the courtyard; they joked while waiting for it to get ready.

The captain was delighted. He had visited the chambers and the huge hall of the mill which looked out upon the river. Now, seated beside the well, he was conversing with Père Merlier.

"Your mill is a real fortress," he said. "We can hold it without difficulty until evening. The bandits are late. They ought to be here."

The miller was grave. He saw his mill burning like a torch, but he uttered no complaint, thinking such a course useless. He merely said:

"You had better hide the boat behind the wheel; there is a place there just fit for that purpose. Perhaps it will be useful to have the boat."

The captain gave the requisite order. This officer was a handsome man of forty; he was tall and had an amiable countenance. The sight of Françoise and Dominique seemed to please him. He contemplated them as if he had forgotten the coming struggle. He followed Françoise with his eyes, and his look told plainly that he thought her charming. Then turning toward Dominique, he asked suddenly:

"Why are you not in the army, my good fellow?"

"I am a foreigner," answered the young man.

The captain evidently did not attach much weight to this reason. He winked his eye and smiled. Françoise was more agreeable company than a cannon. On seeing him smile, Dominique added:

"I am a foreigner, but I can put a ball in an apple at five hundred meters. There is my hunting gun behind you."

"You may have use for it," responded the captain dryly.

Françoise had approached, somewhat agitated. Without heeding the strangers present Dominique took and grasped in his the two hands she extended to him, as if to put herself under his protection. The captain smiled again but said not a word. He remained seated, his sword across his knees and his eyes plunged into space, lost in a reverie.

It was already ten o'clock. The heat had become very great. A heavy silence prevailed. In the courtyard, in the shadows of the sheds, the soldiers had begun to eat their soup. Not a sound came from the village; all its inhabitants had barricaded the doors and windows of their houses. A dog, alone upon the highway, howled. From the neighboring forests and meadows, swooning in the heat, came a prolonged and distant voice made up of all the scattered breaths. A cuckoo sang. Then the silence grew more intense.

Suddenly in that slumbering air a shot was heard. The captain leaped briskly to his feet; the soldiers left their plates of soup, yet half full. In a few seconds everybody was at the post of duty; from bottom to top the mill was occupied. Meanwhile the captain, who had gone out upon the road, had discovered nothing; to the right and to the left the highway stretched out, empty and white. A second shot was heard, and still nothing visible, not even a shadow. But as he was returning the captain perceived in the direction of Gagny, between two trees, a light puff of smoke whirling away like thistledown. The wood was calm and peaceful.

"The bandits have thrown themselves into the forest," he muttered. "They know we are here."

Then the firing continued, growing more and more vigorous, between the French soldiers posted around the mill and the Prussians hidden behind the trees. The balls whistled above the Morelle without damaging either side. The fusillade was irregular, the shots coming from every bush, and still only the little puffs of smoke, tossed gently by the breeze, were seen. This lasted nearly two hours. The officer hummed a tune with an air of indifference. Françoise and Dominique, who had remained in the courtyard, raised themselves on tiptoe and looked over a low wall. They were particularly interested in a little soldier posted on the shore of the Morelle, behind the remains of an old bateau; he stretched himself out flat on the ground, watched, fired and then glided into a ditch a trifle farther back to reload his gun; and his movements were so droll, so tricky and so supple, that they smiled as they looked at him. He must have perceived the head of a Prussian, for he arose quickly and brought his weapon to his shoulder, but before he could fire he uttered a cry, fell and rolled into the ditch, where for an instant his legs twitched convulsively like the claws of a chicken just killed. The little soldier had received a ball full in the breast. He was the first man slain. Instinctively Françoise seized Dominique's hand and clasped it with a nervous contraction.

"Move away," said the captain. "You are within range of the balls."

At that moment a sharp little thud was heard in the old elm, and a fragment of a branch came whirling down. But the two young folks did not stir; they were nailed to the spot by anxiety to see what was going on. On the

edge of the wood a Prussian had suddenly come out from behind a tree as from a theater stage entrance, beating the air with his hands and falling backward. Nothing further moved; the two corpses seemed asleep in the broad sunlight; not a living soul was seen in the scorching country. Even the crack of the fusillade had ceased. The Morelle alone whispered in its clear tones.

Père Merlier looked at the captain with an air of surprise, as if to ask him if the struggle was over.

"They are getting ready for something worse," muttered the officer. "Don't trust appearances. Move away from there."

He had not finished speaking when there was a terrible discharge of musketry. The great elm was riddled, and a host of leaves shot into the air. The Prussians had happily fired too high. Dominique dragged, almost carried, Françoise away, while Père Merlier followed them, shouting:

"Go down into the cellar; the walls are solid!"

But they did not heed him; they entered the huge hall where ten soldiers were waiting in silence, watching through the chinks in the closed window shutters. The captain was alone in the courtyard, crouching behind the little wall, while the furious discharges continued. Without, the soldiers he had posted gave ground only foot by foot. However, they re-entered one by one, crawling, when the enemy had dislodged them from their hiding places. Their orders were to gain time and not show themselves, that the Prussians might remain in ignorance as to what force was before them. Another hour went by. As a sergeant arrived, saying that but two or three more men remained without, the captain glanced at his watch, muttering:

"Half-past two o'clock. We must hold the position four hours longer."

He caused the great gate of the courtyard to be closed, and every preparation was made for an energetic resistance. As the Prussians were on the opposite side of the Morelle, an immediate assault was not to be feared. There was a bridge two kilometers away, but they evidently were not aware of its existence, and it was hardly likely that they would attempt to ford the river. The officer, therefore, simply ordered the highway to be watched. Every effort would be made in the direction of the country.

Again the fusillade had ceased. The mill seemed dead beneath the glowing sun. Not a shutter was open; no sound came from the interior. At length, little by little, the Prussians showed themselves at the edge of the forest of Gagny. They stretched their necks and grew bold. In the mill several soldiers had already raised their guns to their shoulders, but the captain cried:

"No, no; wait. Let them come nearer."

They were exceedingly prudent, gazing at the mill with a suspicious air. The silent and somber old structure with its curtains of ivy filled them with uneasiness. Nevertheless, they advanced. When fifty of them were in the opposite meadow the officer uttered the single word:

"Fire!"

A crash was heard; isolated shots followed. Françoise, all of a tremble, had mechanically put her hands to her ears. Dominique, behind the soldiers, looked on; when the smoke had somewhat lifted he saw three Prussians stretched

upon their backs in the center of the meadow. The others had thrown themselves behind the willows and poplars. Then the siege began.

For more than an hour the mill was riddled with balls. They dashed against the old walls like hail. When they struck the stones they were heard to flatten and fall into the water. They buried themselves in the wood with a hollow sound. Occasionally a sharp crack announced that the mill wheel had been hit. The soldiers in the interior were careful of their shots; they fired only when they could take aim. From time to time the captain consulted his watch. As a ball broke a shutter and plowed into the ceiling he said to himself:

"Four o'clock. We shall never be able to hold out!"

Little by little the terrible fusillade weakened the old mill. A shutter fell into the water, pierced like a bit of lace, and it was necessary to replace it with a mattress. Père Merlier constantly exposed himself to ascertain the extent of the damage done to his poor wheel, the cracking of which made his heart ache. All would be over with it this time; never could he repair it. Dominique had implored Françoise to withdraw, but she refused to leave him; she was seated behind a huge oaken clothespress, which protected her. A ball, however, struck the clothespress, the sides of which gave forth a hollow sound. Then Dominique placed himself in front of Françoise. He had not yet fired a shot; he held his gun in his hand but was unable to approach the windows, which were altogether occupied by the soldiers. At each discharge the floor shook.

"Attention! Attention!" suddenly cried the captain.

He had just seen a great dark mass emerge from the wood. Immediately a formidable platoon fire opened. It was like a waterspout passing over the mill. Another shutter was shattered, and through the gaping opening of the window the balls entered. Two soldiers rolled upon the floor. One of them lay like a stone; they pushed the body against the wall because it was in the way. The other twisted in agony, begging his comrades to finish him, but they paid no attention to him. The balls entered in a constant stream; each man took care of himself and strove to find a loophole through which to return the fire. A third soldier was hit; he uttered not a word; he fell on the edge of a table, with eyes fixed and haggard. Opposite these dead men Françoise, stricken with horror, had mechanically pushed away her chair to sit on the floor against the wall; she thought she would take up less room there and not be in so much danger. Meanwhile the soldiers had collected all the mattresses of the household and partially stopped up the windows with them. The hall was filled with wrecks, with broken weapons and demolished furniture.

"Five o'clock," said the captain. "Keep up your courage! They are about to try to cross the river!"

At that moment Françoise uttered a cry. A ball which had ricocheted had grazed her forehead. Several drops of blood appeared. Dominique stared at her; then, approaching the window, he fired his first shot. Once started, he did not stop. He loaded and fired without heeding what was passing around him, but from time to time he glanced at Françoise. He was very deliberate

and aimed with care. The Prussians, keeping beside the poplars, attempted the passage of the Morelle, as the captain had predicted, but as soon as a man strove to cross he fell, shot in the head by Dominique. The captain, who had his eyes on the young man, was amazed. He complimented him, saying that he should be glad to have many such skillful marksmen. Dominique did not hear him. A ball cut his shoulder; another wounded his arm, but he continued to fire.

There were two more dead men. The mangled mattresses no longer stopped the windows. The last discharge seemed as if it would have carried away the mill. The position had ceased to be tenable. Nevertheless, the captain said firmly:

"Hold your ground for half an hour more!"

Now he counted the minutes. He had promised his chiefs to hold the enemy in check there until evening, and he would not give an inch before the hour he had fixed on for the retreat. He preserved his amiable air and smiled upon Françoise to reassure her. He had picked up the gun of a dead soldier and himself was firing.

Only four soldiers remained in the hall. The Prussians appeared in a body on the other side of the Morelle, and it was clear that they intended speedily to cross the river. A few minutes more elapsed. The stubborn captain would not order the retreat. Just then a sergeant hastened to him and said:

"They are upon the highway; they will take us in the rear!"

The Prussians must have found the bridge. The captain pulled out his watch and looked at it.

"Five minutes longer," he said. "They cannot get here before that time!"

Then at six o'clock exactly he at last consented to lead his men out through a little door which opened into a lane. From there they threw themselves into a ditch; they gained the forest of Sauval. Before taking his departure the captain bowed very politely to Père Merlier and made his excuses, adding:

"Amuse them! We will return!"

Dominique was now alone in the hall. He was still firing, hearing nothing, understanding nothing. He felt only the need of defending Françoise. He had not the least suspicion in the world that the soldiers had retreated. He aimed and killed his man at every shot. Suddenly there was a loud noise. The Prussians had entered the courtyard from behind. Dominique fired a last shot, and they fell upon him while his gun was yet smoking.

Four men held him. Others vociferated around him in a frightful language. They were ready to slaughter him on the spot. Françoise, with a supplicating look, had cast herself before him. But an officer entered and ordered the prisoner to be delivered up to him. After exchanging a few words in German with the soldiers he turned toward Dominique and said to him roughly in very good French:

"You will be shot in two hours!"

CHAPTER III

THE FLIGHT

It was a settled rule of the German staff that every Frenchman, not belonging to the regular army, taken with arms in his hands should be shot. The militia companies themselves were not recognized as belligerents. By thus making terrible examples of the peasants who defended their homes, the Germans hoped to prevent the levy en masse, which they feared.

The officer, a tall, lean man of fifty, briefly questioned Dominique. Although he spoke remarkably pure French he had a stiffness altogether Prussian.

"Do you belong to this district?" he asked.

"No; I am a Belgian," answered the young man.

"Why then did you take up arms? The fighting did not concern you!"

Dominique made no reply. At that moment the officer saw Françoise who was standing by, very pale, listening; upon her white forehead her slight wound had put a red bar. He looked at the young folks, one after the other, seemed to understand matters and contented himself with adding:

"You do not deny having fired, do you?"

"I fired as often as I could!" responded Dominique tranquilly.

This confession was useless, for he was black with powder, covered with sweat and stained with a few drops of blood which had flowed from the scratch on his shoulder.

"Very well," said the officer. "You will be shot in two hours!"

Françoise did not cry out. She clasped her hands and raised them with a gesture of mute despair. The officer noticed this gesture. Two soldiers had taken Dominique to a neighboring apartment, where they were to keep watch over him. The young girl had fallen upon a chair, totally overcome; she could not weep; she was suffocating. The officer had continued to examine her. At last he spoke to her.

"Is that young man your brother?" he demanded.

She shook her head negatively. The German stood stiffly on his feet without a smile. Then after a short silence he again asked:

"Has he lived long in the district?"

She nodded affirmatively.

"In that case, he ought to be thoroughly acquainted with the neighboring forests."

This time she spoke.

"He is thoroughly acquainted with them, monsieur," she said, looking at him with considerable surprise.

He said nothing further to her but turned upon his heel, demanding that the mayor of the village should be brought to him. But Françoise had arisen with a slight blush on her countenance; thinking that she had seized the aim of the officer's questions, she had recovered hope. She herself ran to find her father.

Père Merlier, as soon as the firing had ceased, had quickly descended to the wooden gallery to examine his wheel. He adored his daughter; he had a solid friendship for Dominique, his future son-in-law, but his wheel also held a large place in his heart. Since the two young ones, as he called them, had come safe and sound out of the fight, he thought of his other tenderness, which had suffered greatly. Bent over the huge wooden carcass, he was studying its wounds with a sad air. Five buckets were shattered to pieces; the central framework was riddled. He thrust his fingers in the bullet holes to measure their depth; he thought how he could repair all these injuries. Françoise found him already stopping up the clefts with rubbish and moss.

"Father," she said, "you are wanted."

And she wept at last as she told him what she had just heard. Père Merlier tossed his head. People were not shot in such a summary fashion. The matter must be looked after. He re-entered the mill with his silent and tranquil air. When the officer demanded of him provisions for his men he replied that the inhabitants of Rocreuse were not accustomed to be treated roughly and that nothing would be obtained from them if violence were employed. He would see to everything but on condition that he was not interfered with. The officer at first seemed irritated by his calm tone; then he gave way before the old man's short and clear words. He even called him back and asked him:

"What is the name of that wood opposite?"

"The forest of Sauval."

"What is its extent?"

The miller looked at him fixedly.

"I do not know," he answered.

And he went away. An hour later the contribution of war in provisions and money, demanded by the officer, was in the courtyard of the mill. Night came on. Françoise watched with anxiety the movements of the soldiers. She hung about the room in which Dominique was imprisoned. Toward seven o'clock she experienced a poignant emotion. She saw the officer enter the prisoner's apartment and for a quarter of an hour heard their voices in loud conversation. For an instant the officer reappeared upon the threshold to give an order in German, which she did not understand, but when twelve men ranged themselves in the courtyard, their guns on their shoulders, she trembled and felt as if about to faint. All then was over: the execution was going to take place. The twelve men stood there ten minutes, Dominique's voice continuing to be raised in a tone of violent refusal. Finally the officer came out, saying, as he roughly shut the door:

"Very well; reflect. I give you until tomorrow morning."

And with a gesture he ordered the twelve men to break ranks. Françoise was stupefied. Père Merlier, who had been smoking his pipe and looking at the platoon simply with an air of curiosity, took her by the arm with paternal gentleness. He led her to her chamber.

"Be calm," he said, "and try to sleep. Tomorrow, when it is light, we will see what can be done."

As he withdrew he prudently locked her in. It was his opinion that women

were good for nothing and that they spoiled everything when they took a hand in a serious affair. But Françoise did not retire. She sat for a long while upon the side of her bed, listening to the noises of the house. The German soldiers encamped in the courtyard sang and laughed; they must have been eating and drinking until eleven o'clock, for the racket did not cease an instant. In the mill itself heavy footsteps resounded from time to time, without doubt those of the sentinels who were being relieved. But she was interested most by the sounds she could distinguish in the apartment beneath her chamber. Many times she stretched herself out at full length and put her ear to the floor. That apartment was the one in which Dominique was confined. He must have been walking back and forth from the window to the wall, for she long heard the regular cadence of his steps. Then deep silence ensued; he had doubtless seated himself. Finally every noise ceased and all was as if asleep. When slumber appeared to her to have settled on the house she opened her window as gently as possible and leaned her elbows on the sill.

Without, the night had a warm serenity. The slender crescent of the moon, which was sinking behind the forest of Sauval, lit up the country with the glimmer of a night lamp. The lengthened shadows of the tall trees barred the meadows with black, while the grass in uncovered spots assumed the softness of greenish velvet. But Françoise did not pause to admire the mysterious charms of the night. She examined the country, searching for the sentinels whom the Germans had posted obliquely. She clearly saw their shadows extending like the rounds of a ladder along the Morelle. Only one was before the mill, on the other shore of the river, beside a willow, the branches of which dipped in the water. Françoise saw him plainly. He was a tall man and was standing motionless, his face turned toward the sky with the dreamy air of a shepherd.

When she had carefully inspected the locality she again seated herself on her bed. She remained there an hour, deeply absorbed. Then she listened once more: there was not a sound in the mill. She returned to the window and glanced out, but doubtless one of the horns of the moon, which was still visible behind the trees, made her uneasy, for she resumed her waiting attitude. At last she thought the proper time had come. The night was as black as jet; she could no longer see the sentinel opposite; the country spread out like a pool of ink. She strained her ear for an instant and made her decision. Passing near the window was an iron ladder, the bars fastened to the wall, which mounted from the wheel to the garret and formerly enabled the millers to reach certain machinery; afterward the mechanism had been altered, and for a long while the ladder had been hidden under the thick ivy which covered that side of the mill.

Françoise bravely climbed out of her window and grasped one of the bars of the ladder. She began to descend. Her skirts embarrassed her greatly. Suddenly a stone was detached from the wall and fell into the Morelle with a loud splash. She stopped with an icy shiver of fear. Then she realized that the waterfall with its continuous roar would drown every noise she might make, and she descended more courageously, feeling the ivy with her foot,

assuring herself that the rounds were firm. When she was at the height of the chamber which served as Dominique's prison she paused. An unforeseen difficulty nearly caused her to lose all her courage: the window of the chamber was not directly below that of her apartment. She hung off from the ladder, but when she stretched out her arm her hand encountered only the wall. Must she, then, ascend without pushing her plan to completion? Her arms were fatigued; the murmur of the Morelle beneath her commenced to make her dizzy. Then she tore from the wall little fragments of plaster and threw them against Dominique's window. He did not hear; he was doubtless asleep. She crumbled more plaster from the wall, scraping the skin off her fingers. She was utterly exhausted; she felt herself falling backward, when Dominique at last softly opened the window.

"It is I!" she murmured. "Catch me quickly; I'm falling!"

It was the first time that she had addressed him familiarly. Leaning out, he seized her and drew her into the chamber. There she gave vent to a flood of tears, stifling her sobs that she might not be heard. Then by a supreme effort she calmed herself.

"Are you guarded?" she asked in a low voice.

Dominique, still stupefied at seeing her thus, nodded his head affirmatively, pointing to the door. On the other side they heard someone snoring; the sentinel, yielding to sleep, had thrown himself on the floor against the door, arguing that by disposing himself thus the prisoner could not escape.

"You must fly," resumed Françoise excitedly. "I have come to beg you to do so and to bid you farewell."

But he did not seem to hear her. He repeated:

"What? Is it you; is it you? Oh, what fear you caused me! You might have killed yourself!"

He seized her hands; he kissed them.

"How I love you, Françoise!" he murmured. "You are as courageous as good. I had only one dread: that I should die without seeing you again. But you are here, and now they can shoot me. When I have passed a quarter of an hour with you I shall be ready."

Little by little he had drawn her to him, and she leaned her head upon his shoulder. The danger made them dearer to each other. They forgot everything in that warm clasp.

"Ah, Françoise," resumed Dominique in a caressing voice, "this is Saint Louis's Day, the day, so long awaited, of our marriage. Nothing has been able to separate us, since we are both here alone, faithful to the appointment. Is not this our wedding morning?"

"Yes, yes," she repeated, "it is our wedding morning."

They tremblingly exchanged a kiss. But all at once she disengaged herself from Dominique's arms; she remembered the terrible reality.

"You must fly; you must fly," she whispered. "There is not a minute to be lost!"

And as he stretched out his arms in the darkness to clasp her again, she said tenderly:

"Oh, I implore you to listen to me! If you die I shall die also! In an hour it will be light. I want you to go at once."

Then rapidly she explained her plan. The iron ladder descended to the mill wheel; there he could climb down the buckets and get into the boat which was hidden away in a nook. Afterward it would be easy for him to reach the other bank of the river and escape.

"But what of the sentinels?" he asked.

"There is only one, opposite, at the foot of the first willow."

"What if he should see me and attempt to give an alarm?"

Françoise shivered. She placed in his hand a knife she had brought with her. There was a brief silence.

"What is to become of your father and yourself?" resumed Dominique. "No, I cannot fly! When I am gone those soldiers will, perhaps, massacre you both! You do not know them. They offered me my life if I would consent to guide them through the forest of Sauval. When they discover my escape they will be capable of anything!"

The young girl did not stop to argue. She said simply in reply to all the reasons he advanced:

"Out of love for me, fly! If you love me, Dominique, do not remain here another moment!"

Then she promised to climb back to her chamber. No one would know that she had helped him. She finally threw her arms around him to convince him with an embrace, with a burst of extraordinary love. He was vanquished. He asked but one more question:

"Can you swear to me that your father knows what you have done and that he advises me to fly?"

"My father sent me!" answered Françoise boldly.

She told a falsehood. At that moment she had only one immense need: to know that he was safe, to escape from the abominable thought that the sun would be the signal for his death. When he was far away every misfortune might fall upon her; that would seem delightful to her from the moment he was secure. The selfishness of her tenderness desired that he should live before everything.

"Very well," said Dominique; "I will do what you wish."

They said nothing more. Dominique reopened the window. But suddenly a sound froze them. The door was shaken, and they thought that it was about to be opened. Evidently a patrol had heard their voices. Standing locked in each other's arms, they waited in unspeakable anguish. The door was shaken a second time, but it did not open. They uttered low sighs of relief; they comprehended that the soldier who was asleep against the door must have turned over. In fact, silence succeeded; the snoring was resumed.

Dominique exacted that Françoise should ascend to her chamber before he departed. He clasped her in his arms and bade her a mute adieu. Then he aided her to seize the ladder and clung to it in his turn. But he refused to descend a single round until convinced that she was in her apartment. When

Françoise had entered her window she let fall in a voice as light as a breath: "Au revoir, my love!"

She leaned her elbows on the sill and strove to follow Dominique with her eyes. The night was yet very dark. She searched for the sentinel but could not see him; the willow alone made a pale stain in the midst of the gloom. For an instant she heard the sound produced by Dominique's body in passing along the ivy. Then the wheel cracked, and there was a slight agitation in the water which told her that the young man had found the boat. A moment afterward she distinguished the somber silhouette of the bateau on the gray surface of the Morelle. Terrible anguish seized upon her. Each instant she thought she heard the sentinel's cry of alarm; the smallest sounds scattered through the gloom seemed to her the hurried tread of soldiers, the clatter of weapons, the charging of guns. Nevertheless, the seconds elapsed and the country maintained its profound peace. Dominique must have reached the other side of the river. Françoise saw nothing more. The silence was majestic. She heard a shuffling of feet, a hoarse cry and the hollow fall of a body. Afterward the silence grew deeper. Then as if she had felt Death pass by, she stood, chilled through and through, staring into the thick night.

CHAPTER IV

A TERRIBLE EXPERIENCE

AT DAWN a clamor of voices shook the mill. Père Merlier opened the door of Françoise's chamber. She went down into the courtyard, pale and very calm. But there she could not repress a shiver as she saw the corpse of a Prussian soldier stretched out on a cloak beside the well.

Around the body troops gesticulated, uttering cries of fury. Many of them shook their fists at the village. Meanwhile the officer had summoned Père Merlier as the mayor of the commune.

"Look!" he said to him in a voice almost choking with anger. "There lies one of our men who was found assassinated upon the bank of the river. We must make a terrible example, and I count on you to aid us in discovering the murderer."

"As you choose," answered the miller with his usual stoicism, "but you will find it no easy task."

The officer stooped and drew aside a part of the cloak which hid the face of the dead man. Then appeared a horrible wound. The sentinel had been struck in the throat, and the weapon had remained in the cut. It was a kitchen knife with a black handle.

"Examine that knife," said the officer to Père Merlier; "perhaps it will help us in our search."

The old man gave a start but recovered control of himself immediately. He replied without moving a muscle of his face:

"Everybody in the district has similar knives. Doubtless your man was weary of fighting and put an end to his own life. It looks like it!"

"Mind what you say!" cried the officer furiously. "I do not know what prevents me from setting fire to the four corners of the village!"

Happily in his rage he did not notice the deep trouble pictured on Françoise's countenance. She had been forced to sit down on a stone bench near the well. Despite herself her eyes were fixed upon the corpse stretched out on the ground almost at her feet. It was that of a tall and handsome man who resembled Dominique, with flaxen hair and blue eyes. This resemblance made her heart ache. She thought that perhaps the dead soldier had left behind him in Germany a sweetheart who would weep her eyes out for him. She recognized her knife in the throat of the murdered man. She had killed him.

The officer was talking of striking Rocreuse with terrible measures, when soldiers came running to him. Dominique's escape had just been discovered. It caused an extreme agitation. The officer went to the apartment in which the prisoner had been confined, looked out of the window which had remained open, understood everything and returned, exasperated.

Père Merlier seemed greatly vexed by Dominique's flight.

"The imbecile!" he muttered. "He has ruined all!"

Françoise heard him and was overcome with anguish. But the miller did not suspect her of complicity in the affair. He tossed his head, saying to her in an undertone:

"We are in a nice scrape!"

"It was that wretch who assassinated the soldier! I am sure of it!" cried the officer. "He has undoubtedly reached the forest. But he must be found for us or the village shall pay for him!"

Turning to the miller, he said:

"See here, you ought to know where he is hidden!"

Père Merlier laughed silently, pointing to the wide stretch of wooden hills.

"Do you expect to find a man in there?" he said.

"Oh, there must be nooks there with which you are acquainted. I will give you ten men. You must guide them."

"As you please. But it will take a week to search all the wood in the vicinity."

The old man's tranquillity enraged the officer. In fact, the latter comprehended the absurdity of this search. At that moment he saw Françoise, pale and trembling, on the bench. The anxious attitude of the young girl struck him. He was silent for an instant, during which he in turn examined the miller and his daughter.

At length he demanded roughly of the old man:

"Is not that fellow your child's lover?"

Père Merlier grew livid and seemed about to hurl himself upon the officer to strangle him. He stiffened himself but made no answer. Françoise buried her face in her hands.

"Yes, that's it!" continued the Prussian. "And you or your daughter helped him to escape! One of you is his accomplice! For the last time, will you give him up to us?"

The miller uttered not a word. He turned away and looked into space with

an air of indifference, as if the officer had not addressed him. This brought the latter's rage to a head.

"Very well!" he shouted. "You shall be shot in his place!"

And he again ordered out the platoon of execution. Père Merlier remained as stoical as ever. He hardly even shrugged his shoulders; all this drama appeared to him in bad taste. Without doubt he did not believe that they would shoot a man so lightly. But when the platoon drew up before him he said gravely:

"So it is serious, is it? Go on with your bloody work then! If you must have a victim I will do as well as another!"

But Françoise started up, terrified, stammering:

"In pity, monsieur, do no harm to my father! Kill me in his stead! I aided Dominique to fly! I alone am guilty!"

"Hush, my child!" cried Père Merlier. "Why do you tell an untruth? She passed the night locked in her chamber, monsieur. She tells a falsehood, I assure you!"

"No, I do not tell a falsehood!" resumed the young girl ardently. "I climbed out of my window and went down the iron ladder; I urged Dominique to fly. This is the truth, the whole truth!"

The old man became very pale. He saw clearly in her eyes that she did not lie, and her story terrified him. Ah, these children with their hearts, how they spoil everything! Then he grew angry and exclaimed:

"She is mad; do not heed her. She tells you stupid tales. Come, finish your work!"

She still protested. She knelt, clasping her hands. The officer tranquilly watched this dolorous struggle.

"*Mon Dieu!*" he said at last. "I take your father because I have not the other. Find the fugitive and the old man shall be set at liberty!"

She gazed at him with staring eyes, astonished at the atrocity of the proposition.

"How horrible!" she murmured. "Where do you think I can find Dominique at this hour? He has departed; I know no more about him."

"Come, make your choice—him or your father."

"Oh, *mon Dieu!* How can I choose? If I knew where Dominique was I could not choose! You are cutting my heart. I would rather die at once. Yes, it would be the sooner over. Kill me, I implore you, kill me!"

This scene of despair and tears finally made the officer impatient. He cried out:

"Enough! I will be merciful. I consent to give you two hours. If in that time your lover is not here your father will be shot in his place!"

He caused Père Merlier to be taken to the chamber which had served as Dominique's prison. The old man demanded tobacco and began to smoke. Upon his impassable face not the slightest emotion was visible. But when alone, as he smoked, he shed two big tears which ran slowly down his cheeks. His poor, dear child, how she was suffering!

Françoise remained in the middle of the courtyard. Prussian soldiers passed,

laughing. Some of them spoke to her, uttered jokes she could not understand. She stared at the door through which her father had disappeared. With a slow movement she put her hand to her forehead, as if to prevent it from bursting.

The officer turned upon his heel, saying:

"You have two hours. Try to utilize them."

She had two hours. This phrase buzzed in her ears. Then mechanically she quitted the courtyard; she walked straight ahead. Where should she go?—what should she do? She did not even try to make a decision because she well understood the inutility of her efforts. However, she wished to see Dominique. They could have an understanding together; they might, perhaps, find an expedient. And amid the confusion of her thoughts she went down to the shore of the Morelle, which she crossed below the sluice at a spot where there were huge stones. Her feet led her beneath the first willow, in the corner of the meadow. As she stooped she saw a pool of blood which made her turn pale. It was there the murder had been committed. She followed the track of Dominique in the trodden grass; he must have run, for she perceived a line of long footprints stretching across the meadow. Then farther on she lost these traces. But in a neighboring field she thought she found them again. The new trail conducted her to the edge of the forest, where every indication was effaced.

Françoise, nevertheless, plunged beneath the trees. It solaced her to be alone. She sat down for an instant, but at the thought that time was passing she leaped to her feet. How long had it been since she left the mill? Five minutes?—half an hour? She had lost all conception of time. Perhaps Dominique had concealed himself in a copse she knew of, where they had one afternoon eaten filberts together. She hastened to the copse, searched it. Only a blackbird flew away, uttering its soft, sad note. Then she thought he might have taken refuge in a hollow of the rocks, where it had sometimes been his custom to lie in wait for game, but the hollow of the rocks was empty. What good was it to hunt for him? She would never find him, but little by little the desire to discover him took entire possession of her, and she hastened her steps. The idea that he might have climbed a tree suddenly occurred to her. She advanced with uplifted eyes, and that he might be made aware of her presence she called him every fifteen or twenty steps. Cuckoos answered; a breath of wind which passed through the branches made her believe that he was there and was descending. Once she even imagined she saw him; she stopped, almost choked, and wished to fly. What was she to say to him? Had she come to take him back to be shot? Oh no, she would not tell him what had happened. She would cry out to him to escape, not to remain in the neighborhood. Then the thought that her father was waiting for her gave her a sharp pain. She fell upon the turf, weeping, crying aloud:

"Mon Dieu! Mon Dieu! Why am I here?"

She was mad to have come. And as if seized with fear, she ran; she sought to leave the forest. Three times she deceived herself; she thought she never again would find the mill, when she entered a meadow just opposite Rocreuse.

As soon as she saw the village she paused. Was she going to return alone?

She was still hesitating when a voice softly called:

"Françoise! Françoise!"

And she saw Dominique, who had raised his head above the edge of a ditch. Just God! She had found him! Did heaven wish his death? She restrained a cry; she let herself glide into the ditch.

"Are you searching for me?" asked the young man.

"Yes," she answered, her brain in a whirl, not knowing what she said.

"What has happened?"

She lowered her eyes, stammered:

"Nothing. I was uneasy; I wanted to see you."

Then, reassured, he explained to her that he had resolved not to go away. He was doubtful about the safety of herself and her father. Those Prussian wretches were fully capable of taking vengeance upon women and old men. But everything was getting on well. He added with a laugh:

"Our wedding will take place in a week—I am sure of it."

Then as she remained overwhelmed, he grew grave again and said:

"But what ails you? You are concealing something from me!"

"No; I swear it to you. I am out of breath from running."

He embraced her, saying that it was imprudent for them to be talking, and he wished to climb out of the ditch to return to the forest. She restrained him. She trembled.

"Listen," she said: "it would, perhaps, be wise for you to remain where you are. No one is searching for you; you have nothing to fear."

"Françoise, you are concealing something from me," he repeated.

Again she swore that she was hiding nothing. She had simply wished to know that he was near her. And she stammered forth still further reasons. She seemed so strange to him that he now could not be induced to flee. Besides, he had faith in the return of the French. Troops had been seen in the direction of Sauval.

"Ah, let them hurry; let them get here as soon as possible," she murmured fervently.

At that moment eleven o'clock sounded from the belfry of Rocreuse. The strokes were clear and distinct. She arose with a terrified look; two hours had passed since she quitted the mill.

"Hear me," she said rapidly: "if we have need of you I will wave my handkerchief from my chamber window."

And she departed on a run, while Dominique, very uneasy, stretched himself out upon the edge of the ditch to watch the mill. As she was about to enter Rocreuse, Françoise met an old beggar, Père Bontemps, who knew everybody in the district. He bowed to her; he had just seen the miller in the midst of the Prussians; then, making the sign of the cross and muttering broken words, he went on his way.

"The two hours have passed," said the officer when Françoise appeared.

Père Merlier was there, seated upon the bench beside the well. He was smoking. The young girl again begged, wept, sank on her knees. She wished

to gain time. The hope of seeing the French return had increased in her, and while lamenting she thought she heard in the distance, the measured tramp of an army. Oh, if they would come, if they would deliver them all!

"Listen, monsieur," she said: "an hour, another hour; you can grant us another hour!"

But the officer remained inflexible. He even ordered two men to seize her and take her away, that they might quietly proceed with the execution of the old man. Then a frightful struggle took place in Françoise's heart. She could not allow her father to be thus assassinated. No, no; she would die rather with Dominique. She was running toward her chamber when Dominique himself entered the courtyard.

The officer and the soldiers uttered a shout of triumph. But the young man, calmly, with a somewhat severe look, went up to Françoise, as if she had been the only person present.

"You did wrong," he said. "Why did you not bring me back? It remained for Père Bontemps to tell me everything. But I am here!"

CHAPTER V

THE RETURN OF THE FRENCH

IT WAS THREE O'CLOCK in the afternoon. Great black clouds, the trail of some neighboring storm, had slowly filled the sky. The yellow heavens, the brass-covered uniforms, had changed the valley of Rocreuse, so gay in the sunlight, into a den of cutthroats full of sinister gloom. The Prussian officer had contented himself with causing Dominique to be imprisoned without announcing what fate he reserved for him. Since noon Françoise had been torn by terrible anguish. Despite her father's entreaties she would not quit the courtyard. She was awaiting the French. But the hours sped on; night was approaching, and she suffered the more as all the time gained did not seem to be likely to change the frightful denouement.

About three o'clock the Prussians made their preparations for departure. For an instant past the officer had, as on the previous day, shut himself up with Dominique. Françoise realized that the young man's life was in balance. She clasped her hands; she prayed. Père Merlier, beside her, maintained silence and the rigid attitude of an old peasant who does not struggle against fate.

"Oh, *mon Dieu!* Oh, *mon Dieu!*" murmured Françoise. "They are going to kill him!"

The miller drew her to him and took her on his knees as if she had been a child.

At that moment the officer came out, while behind him two men brought Dominique.

"Never! Never!" cried the latter. "I am ready to die!"

"Think well," resumed the officer. "The service you refuse me another will render us. I am generous: I offer you your life. I want you simply to

guide us through the forest to Montredon. There must be pathways leading there."

Dominique was silent.

"So you persist in your infatuation, do you?"

"Kill me and end all this!" replied the young man.

Françoise, her hands clasped, supplicated him from afar. She had forgotten everything; she would have advised him to commit an act of cowardice. But Père Merlier seized her hands that the Prussians might not see her wild gestures.

"He is right," he whispered: "it is better to die!"

The platoon of execution was there. The officer awaited a sign of weakness on Dominique's part. He still expected to conquer him. No one spoke. In the distance violent crashes of thunder were heard. Oppressive heat weighed upon the country. But suddenly, amid the silence, a cry broke forth:

"The French! The French!"

Yes, the French were at hand. Upon the Sauval highway, at the edge of the wood, the line of red pantaloons could be distinguished. In the mill there was an extraordinary agitation. The Prussian soldiers ran hither and thither with guttural exclamations. Not a shot had yet been fired.

"The French! The French!" cried Françoise, clapping her hands.

She was wild with joy. She escaped from her father's grasp; she laughed and tossed her arms in the air. At last they had come and come in time, since Dominique was still alive!

A terrible platoon fire, which burst upon her ears like a clap of thunder, caused her to turn. The officer muttered between his teeth:

"Before everything, let us settle this affair!"

And with his own hand pushing Dominique against the wall of a shed he ordered his men to fire. When Françoise looked Dominique lay upon the ground with blood streaming from his neck and shoulders.

She did not weep; she stood stupefied. Her eyes grew fixed, and she sat down under the shed, a few paces from the body. She stared at it, wringing her hands. The Prussians had seized Père Merlier as a hostage.

It was a stirring combat. The officer had rapidly posted his men, comprehending that he could not beat a retreat without being cut to pieces. Hence he would fight to the last. Now the Prussians defended the mill, and the French attacked it. The fusillade began with unusual violence. For half an hour it did not cease. Then a hollow sound was heard, and a ball broke a main branch of the old elm. The French had cannon. A battery, stationed just above the ditch in which Dominique had hidden himself, swept the wide street of Rocreuse. The struggle could not last long.

Ah, the poor mill! Balls pierced it in every part. Half of the roof was carried away. Two walls were battered down. But it was on the side of the Morelle that the destruction was most lamentable. The ivy, torn from the tottering edifice, hung like rags; the river was encumbered with wrecks of all kinds, and through a breach was visible Françoise's chamber with its bed, the white curtains of which were carefully closed. Shot followed shot; the

old wheel received two balls and gave vent to an agonizing groan; the buckets were borne off by the current; the framework was crushed. The soul of the gay mill had left it!

Then the French began the assault. There was a furious fight with swords and bayonets. Beneath the rust-colored sky the valley was choked with the dead. The broad meadows had a wild look with their tall, isolated trees and their hedges of poplars which stained them with shade. To the right and to the left the forests were like the walls of an ancient amphitheater which enclosed the fighting gladiators, while the springs, the fountains and the flowing brooks seemed to sob amid the panic of the country.

Beneath the shed Françoise still sat near Dominique's body; she had not moved. Père Merlier had received a slight wound. The Prussians were exterminated, but the ruined mill was on fire in a dozen places. The French rushed into the courtyard, headed by their captain. It was his first success of the war. His face beamed with triumph. He waved his sword, shouting:

"Victory! Victory!"

On seeing the wounded miller, who was endeavoring to comfort Françoise, and noticing the body of Dominique, his joyous look changed to one of sadness. Then he knelt beside the young man and, tearing open his blouse, put his hand to his heart.

"Thank God!" he cried. "It is yet beating! Send for the surgeon!"

At the captain's words Françoise leaped to her feet.

"There is hope!" she cried. "Oh, tell me there is hope!"

At that moment the surgeon appeared. He made a hasty examination and said:

"The young man is severely hurt, but life is not extinct; he can be saved!"

By the surgeon's orders Dominique was transported to a neighboring cottage, where he was placed in bed. His wounds were dressed; restoratives were administered, and he soon recovered consciousness. When he opened his eyes he saw Françoise sitting beside him and through the open window caught sight of Père Merlier talking with the French captain. He passed his hand over his forehead with a bewildered air and said:

"They did not kill me after all!"

"No," replied Françoise. "The French came, and their surgeon saved you."

Père Merlier turned and said through the window:

"No talking yet, my young ones!"

In due time Dominique was entirely restored, and when peace again blessed the land he wedded his beloved Françoise.

The mill was rebuilt, and Père Merlier had a new wheel upon which to bestow whatever tenderness was not engrossed by his daughter and her husband.

CAPTAIN BURLE

CHAPTER I

THE SWINDLE

IT WAS NINE O'CLOCK. The little town of Vauchamp, dark and silent, had just retired to bed amid a chilly November rain. In the Rue des Recollets, one of the narrowest and most deserted streets of the district of Saint-Jean, a single window was still alight on the third floor of an old house, from whose damaged gutters torrents of water were falling into the street. Mme Burle was sitting up before a meager fire of vine stocks, while her little grandson Charles pored over his lessons by the pale light of a lamp.

The apartment, rented at one hundred and sixty francs per annum, consisted of four large rooms which it was absolutely impossible to keep warm during the winter. Mme Burle slept in the largest chamber, her son Captain and Quartermaster Burle occupying a somewhat smaller one overlooking the street, while little Charles had his iron cot at the farther end of a spacious drawing room with mildewed hangings, which was never used. The few pieces of furniture belonging to the captain and his mother, furniture of the massive style of the First Empire, dented and worn by continuous transit from one garrison town to another, almost disappeared from view beneath the lofty ceilings whence darkness fell. The flooring of red-colored tiles was cold and hard to the feet; before the chairs there were merely a few threadbare little rugs of poverty-stricken aspect, and athwart this desert all the winds of heaven blew through the disjointed doors and windows.

Near the fireplace sat Mme Burle, leaning back in her old yellow velvet armchair and watching the last vine branch smoke, with that stolid, blank stare of the aged who live within themselves. She would sit thus for whole days together, with her tall figure, her long stern face and her thin lips that never smiled. The widow of a colonel who had died just as he was on the point of becoming a general, the mother of a captain whom she had followed even in his campaigns, she had acquired a military stiffness of bearing and formed for herself a code of honor, duty and patriotism which kept her rigid, desiccated, as it were, by the stern application of discipline. She seldom, if ever, complained. When her son had become a widower after five years of married life she had undertaken the education of little Charles as a matter of course, performing her duties with the severity of a sergeant drilling recruits. She watched over the child, never tolerating the slightest waywardness or irregularity, but compelling him to sit up till midnight when his exercises were not finished, and sitting up herself until he had completed them. Under such implacable despotism Charles, whose constitution was delicate, grew up pale and thin, with beautiful eyes, inordinately large and clear, shining in his white, pinched face.

During the long hours of silence Mme Burle dwelt continuously upon one and the same idea: she had been disappointed in her son. This thought sufficed to occupy her mind, and under its influence she would live her whole

life over again, from the birth of her son, whom she had pictured rising amid glory to the highest rank, till she came down to mean and narrow garrison life, the dull, monotonous existence of nowadays, that stranding in the post of a quartermaster, from which Burle would never rise and in which he seemed to sink more and more heavily. And yet his first efforts had filled her with pride, and she had hoped to see her dreams realized. Burle had only just left Saint-Cyr when he distinguished himself at the battle of Solferino, where he had captured a whole battery of the enemy's artillery with merely a handful of men. For this feat he had won the cross; the papers had recorded his heroism, and he had become known as one of the bravest soldiers in the army. But gradually the hero had grown stout, embedded in flesh, timorous, lazy and satisfied. In 1870, still a captain, he had been made a prisoner in the first encounter, and he returned from Germany quite furious, swearing that he would never be caught fighting again, for it was too absurd. Being prevented from leaving the army, as he was incapable of embracing any other profession, he applied for and obtained the position of captain quartermaster, "a kennel," as he called it, "in which he would be left to kick the bucket in peace." That day Mme Burle experienced a great internal disruption. She felt that it was all over, and she ever afterward preserved a rigid attitude with tightened lips.

A blast of wind shook the Rue des Recollets and drove the rain angrily against the windowpanes. The old lady lifted her eyes from the smoking vine roots now dying out, to make sure that Charles was not falling asleep over his Latin exercise. This lad, twelve years of age, had become the old lady's supreme hope, the one human being in whom she centered her obstinate yearning for glory. At first she had hated him with all the loathing she had felt for his mother, a weak and pretty young lacemaker whom the captain had been foolish enough to marry when he found out that she would not listen to his passionate addresses on any other condition. Later on, when the mother had died and the father had begun to wallow in vice, Mme Burle dreamed again in presence of that little ailing child whom she found it so hard to rear. She wanted to see him robust, so that he might grow into the hero that Burle had declined to be, and for all her cold ruggedness she watched him anxiously, feeling his limbs and instilling courage into his soul. By degrees, blinded by her passionate desires, she imagined that she had at last found the man of the family. The boy, whose temperament was of a gentle, dreamy character, had a physical horror of soldiering, but as he lived in mortal dread of his grandmother and was extremely shy and submissive, he would echo all she said and resignedly express his intention of entering the army when he grew up.

Mme Burle observed that the exercise was not progressing. In fact, little Charles, overcome by the deafening noise of the storm, was dozing, albeit his pen was between his fingers and his eyes were staring at the paper. The old lady at once struck the edge of the table with her bony hand; whereupon the lad started, opened his dictionary and hurriedly began to turn over the leaves.

Then, still preserving silence, his grandmother drew the vine roots together on the hearth and unsuccessfully attempted to rekindle the fire.

At the time when she had still believed in her son she had sacrificed her small income, which he had squandered in pursuits she dared not investigate. Even now he drained the household; all its resources went to the streets, and it was through him that she lived in penury, with empty rooms and cold kitchen. She never spoke to him of all those things, for with her sense of discipline he remained the master. Only at times she shuddered at the sudden fear that Burle might someday commit some foolish misdeed which would prevent Charles from entering the army.

She was rising up to fetch a fresh piece of wood in the kitchen when a fearful hurricane fell upon the house, making the doors rattle, tearing off a shutter and whirling the water in the broken gutters like a spout against the window. In the midst of the uproar a ring at the bell startled the old lady. Who could it be at such an hour and in such weather? Burle never returned till after midnight, if he came home at all. However, she went to the door. An officer stood before her, dripping with rain and swearing savagely.

"Hell and thunder!" he growled. "What cursed weather!"

It was Major Laguitte, a brave old soldier who had served under Colonel Burle during Mme Burle's palmy days. He had started in life as a drummer boy and, thanks to his courage rather than his intellect, had attained to the command of a battalion, when a painful infirmity—the contraction of the muscles of one of his thighs, due to a wound—obliged him to accept the post of major. He was slightly lame, but it would have been imprudent to tell him so, as he refused to own it.

"What, you, Major?" said Mme Burle with growing astonishment.

"Yes, thunder," grumbled Laguitte, "and I must be confoundedly fond of you to roam the streets on such a night as this. One would think twice before sending even a parson out."

He shook himself, and little rivulets fell from his huge boots onto the floor. Then he looked round him.

"I particularly want to see Burle. Is the lazy beggar already in bed?"

"No, he is not in yet," said the old woman in her harsh voice.

The major looked furious, and, raising his voice, he shouted: "What, not at home? But in that case they hoaxed me at the café, Mélanie's establishment, you know. I went there, and a maid grinned at me, saying that the captain had gone home to bed. Curse the girl! I suspected as much and felt like pulling her ears!"

After this outburst he became somewhat calmer, stamping about the room in an undecided way, withal seeming greatly disturbed. Mme Burle looked at him attentively.

"Is it the captain personally whom you want to see?" she said at last.

"Yes," he answered.

"Can I not tell him what you have to say?"

"No."

She did not insist but remained standing without taking her eyes off the

major, who did not seem able to make up his mind to leave. Finally in a fresh burst of rage he exclaimed with an oath: "It can't be helped. As I am here you may as well know—after all, it is, perhaps, best."

He sat down before the chimney piece, stretching out his muddy boots as if a bright fire had been burning. Mme Burle was about to resume her own seat when she remarked that Charles, overcome by fatigue, had dropped his head between the open pages of his dictionary. The arrival of the major had at first interested him, but, seeing that he remained unnoticed, he had been unable to struggle against his sleepiness. His grandmother turned toward the table to slap his frail little hands, whitening in the lamplight, when Laguitte stopped her.

"No—no!" he said. "Let the poor little man sleep. I haven't got anything funny to say. There's no need for him to hear me."

The old lady sat down in her armchair; deep silence reigned, and they looked at one another.

"Well, yes," said the major at last, punctuating his words with an angry motion of his chin, "he has been and done it; that hound Burle has been and done it!"

Not a muscle of Mme Burle's face moved, but she became livid, and her figure stiffened. Then the major continued: "I had my doubts. I had intended mentioning the subject to you. Burle was spending too much money, and he had an idiotic look which I did not fancy. Thunder and lightning! What a fool a man must be to behave so filthily!"

Then he thumped his knee furiously with his clenched fist and seemed to choke with indignation. The old woman put the straightforward question:

"He has stolen?"

"You can't have an idea of it. You see, I never examined his accounts; I approved and signed them. You know how those things are managed. However, just before the inspection—as the colonel is a crotchety old maniac—I said to Burle: 'I say, old man, look to your accounts; I am answerable, you know,' and then I felt perfectly secure. Well, about a month ago, as he seemed queer and some nasty stories were circulating, I peered a little closer into the books and potted over the entries. I thought everything looked straight and very well kept—"

At this point he stopped, convulsed by such a fit of rage that he had to relieve himself by a volley of appalling oaths. Finally he resumed: "It isn't the swindle that angers me; it is his disgusting behavior to me. He has gammoned me, Madame Burle. By God! Does he take me for an old fool?"

"So he stole?" the mother again questioned.

"This evening," continued the major more quietly, "I had just finished my dinner when Gagneux came in—you know Gagneux, the butcher at the corner of the Place aux Herbes? Another dirty beast who got the meat contract and makes our men eat all the diseased cow flesh in the neighborhood! Well, I received him like a dog, and then he let it all out—blurted out the whole thing, and a pretty mess it is! It appears that Burle only paid him in dribbles and had got himself into a muddle—a confusion of figures which the devil

himself couldn't disentangle. In short, Burle owes the butcher two thousand francs, and Gagneux threatens that he'll inform the colonel if he is not paid. To make matters worse, Burle, just to blind me, handed me every week a forged receipt which he had squarely signed with Gagneux's name. To think he did that to me, his old friend! Ah, curse him!"

With increasing profanity the major rose to his feet, shook his fist at the ceiling and then fell back in his chair. Mine Burle again repeated: "He has stolen. It was inevitable."

Then without a word of judgment or condemnation she added simply: "Two thousand francs—we have not got them. There are barely thirty francs in the house."

"I expected as much," said Laguitte. "And do you know where all the money goes? Why, Mélanie gets it—yes, Mélanie, a creature who has turned Burle into a perfect fool. Ah, those women! Those fiendish women! I always said they would do for him! I cannot conceive what he is made of! He is only five years younger than I am, and yet he is as mad as ever. What a woman hunter he is!"

Another long silence followed. Outside the rain was increasing in violence, and throughout the sleepy little town one could hear the crashing of slates and chimney pots as they were dashed by the blast onto the pavements of the streets.

"Come," suddenly said the major, rising, "my stopping here won't mend matters. I have warned you—and now I'm off."

"What is to be done? To whom can we apply?" muttered the old woman drearily.

"Don't give way—we must consider. If I only had the two thousand francs—but you know that I am not rich."

The major stopped short in confusion. This old bachelor, wifeless and childless, spent his pay in drink and gambled away at *écarté* whatever money his cognac and absinthe left in his pocket. Despite that, however, he was scrupulously honest from a sense of discipline.

"Never mind," he added as he reached the threshold. "I'll begin by stirring him up. I shall move heaven and earth! What! Burle, Colonel Burle's son, condemned for theft! That cannot be! I would sooner burn down the town. Now, thunder and lightning, don't worry; it is far more annoying for me than for you."

He shook the old lady's hand roughly and vanished into the shadows of the staircase, while she held the lamp aloft to light the way. When she returned and replaced the lamp on the table she stood for a moment motionless in front of Charles, who was still asleep with his face lying on the dictionary. His pale cheeks and long fair hair made him look like a girl, and she gazed at him dreamily, a shade of tenderness passing over her harsh countenance. But it was only a passing emotion; her features regained their look of cold, obstinate determination, and, giving the youngster a sharp rap on his little hand, she said:

"Charles—your lessons."

The boy awoke, dazed and shivering, and again rapidly turned over the leaves. At the same moment Major Laguitte, slamming the house door behind him, received on his head a quantity of water falling from the gutters above, whereupon he began to swear in so loud a voice that he could be heard above the storm. And after that no sound broke upon the pelting downpour save the slight rustle of the boy's pen traveling over the paper. Mme Burle had resumed her seat near the chimney piece, still rigid, with her eyes fixed on the dead embers, preserving, indeed, her habitual attitude and absorbed in her one idea.

CHAPTER II

THE CAFÉ

THE CAFÉ DE PARIS, kept by Mélanie Cartier, a widow, was situated on the Place du Palais, a large irregular square planted with meager, dusty elm trees. The place was so well known in Vauchamp that it was customary to say, "Are you coming to Mélanie's?" At the farther end of the first room, which was a spacious one, there was another called "the divan," a narrow apartment having sham leather benches placed against the walls, while at each corner there stood a marble-topped table. The widow, deserting her seat in the front room, where she left her little servant Phrosine, spent her evenings in the inner apartment, ministering to a few customers, the usual frequenters of the place, those who were currently styled "the gentlemen of the divan." When a man belonged to that set it was as if he had a label on his back; he was spoken of with smiles of mingled contempt and envy.

Mme Cartier had become a widow when she was five and twenty. Her husband, a wheelwright, who on the death of an uncle had amazed Vauchamp by taking the Café de Paris, had one fine day brought her back with him from Montpellier, where he was wont to repair twice a year to purchase liqueurs. As he was stocking his establishment he selected, together with divers beverages, a woman of the sort he wanted—of an engaging aspect and apt to stimulate the trade of the house. It was never known where he had picked her up, but he married her after trying her in the café during six months or so. Opinions were divided in Vauchamp as to her merits, some folks declaring that she was superb, while others asserted that she looked like a drum-major. She was a tall woman with large features and coarse hair falling low over her forehead. However, everyone agreed that she knew very well how to fool the sterner sex. She had fine eyes and was wont to fix them with a bold stare on the gentlemen of the divan, who colored and became like wax in her hands. She also had the reputation of possessing a wonderfully fine figure, and southerners appreciate a statuesque style of beauty.

Cartier had died in a singular way. Rumor hinted at a conjugal quarrel, a kick, producing some internal tumor. Whatever may have been the truth, Mélanie found herself encumbered with the café, which was far from doing a prosperous business. Her husband had wasted his uncle's inheritance in drink-

ing his own absinthe and wearing out the cloth of his own billiard table. For a while it was believed that the widow would have to sell out, but she liked the life and the establishment just as it was. If she could secure a few customers the bigger room might remain deserted. So she limited herself to repapering the divan in white and gold and recovering the benches. She began by entertaining a chemist. Then a vermicelli maker, a lawyer and a retired magistrate put in an appearance; and thus it was that the café remained open, although the waiter did not receive twenty orders a day. No objections were raised by the authorities, as appearances were kept up; and, indeed, it was not deemed advisable to interfere, for some respectable folks might have been worried.

Of an evening five or six well-to-do citizens would enter the front room and play at dominoes there. Although Cartier was dead and the Café de Paris had got a queer name, they saw nothing and kept up their old habits. In course of time, the waiter having nothing to do, Mélanie dismissed him and made Phrosine light the solitary gas burner in the corner where the domino players congregated. Occasionally a party of young men, attracted by the gossip that circulated through the town, would come in, wildly excited and laughing loudly and awkwardly. But they were received there with icy dignity. As a rule they did not even see the widow, and even if she happened to be present she treated them with withering disdain, so that they withdrew, stammering and confused. Mélanie was too astute to indulge in any compromising whims. While the front room remained obscure, save in the corner where the few townsfolk rattled their dominoes, she personally waited on the gentlemen of the divan, showing herself amiable without being free, merely venturing in moments of familiarity to lean on the shoulder of one or another of them, the better to watch a skillfully played game of écarté.

One evening the gentlemen of the divan, who had ended by tolerating each other's presence, experienced a disagreeable surprise on finding Captain Burle at home there. He had casually entered the café that same morning to get a glass of vermouth, so it seemed, and he had found Mélanie there. They had conversed, and in the evening when he returned Phrosine immediately showed him to the inner room.

Two days later Burle reigned there supreme; still he had not frightened the chemist, the vermicelli maker, the lawyer or the retired magistrate away. The captain, who was short and dumpy, worshiped tall, plump women. In his regiment he had been nicknamed "Petticoat Burle" on account of his constant philandering. Whenever the officers, and even the privates, met some monstrous-looking creature, some giantess puffed out with fat, whether she were in velvet or in rags, they would invariably exclaim, "There goes one to Petticoat Burle's taste!" Thus Mélanie, with her opulent presence, quite conquered him. He was lost—quite wrecked. In less than a fortnight he had fallen to vacuous imbecility. With much the expression of a whipped hound in the tiny sunken eyes which lighted up his bloated face, he was incessantly watching the widow in mute adoration before her masculine features and stubby hair. For fear that he might be dismissed, he put up with the presence of the other

gentlemen of the divan and spent his pay in the place down to the last copper. A sergeant reviewed the situation in one sentence: "Petticoat Burle is done for; he's a buried man!"

It was nearly ten o'clock when Major Laguitte furiously flung the door of the café open. For a moment those inside could see the deluged square transformed into a dark sea of liquid mud, bubbling under the terrible downpour. The major, now soaked to the skin and leaving a stream behind him, strode up to the small counter where Phrosine was reading a novel.

"You little wretch," he yelled, "you have dared to gammon an officer; you deserve—"

And then he lifted his hand as if to deal a blow such as would have felled an ox. The little maid shrank back, terrified, while the amazed domino players looked, openmouthed. However, the major did not linger there—he pushed the divan door open and appeared before Mélanie and Burle just as the widow was playfully making the captain sip his grog in small spoonfuls, as if she were feeding a pet canary. Only the ex-magistrate and the chemist had come that evening, and they had retired early in a melancholy frame of mind. Then Mélanie, being in want of three hundred francs for the morrow, had taken advantage of the opportunity to cajole the captain.

"Come," she said, "open your mouth; ain't it nice, you greedy piggy-wiggy?"

Burle, flushing scarlet, with glazed eyes and sunken figure, was sucking the spoon with an air of intense enjoyment.

"Good heavens!" roared the major from the threshold. "You now play tricks on me, do you? I'm sent to the roundabout and told that you never came here, and yet all the while here you are, addling your silly brains."

Burle shuddered, pushing the grog away, while Mélanie stepped angrily in front of him as if to shield him with her portly figure, but Laguitte looked at her with that quiet, resolute expression well known to women who are familiar with bodily chastisement.

"Leave us," he said curtly.

She hesitated for the space of a second. She almost felt the gust of the expected blow, and then, white with rage, she joined Phrosine in the outer room.

When the two men were alone Major Laguitte walked up to Burle, looked at him and, slightly stooping, yelled into his face these two words: "You pig!"

The captain, quite dazed, endeavored to retort, but he had not time to do so.

"Silence!" resumed the major. "You have bamboozled a friend. You palmed off on me a lot of forged receipts which might have sent both of us to the gallows. Do you call that proper behavior? Is that the sort of trick to play a friend of thirty years' standing?"

Burle, who had fallen back in his chair, was livid; his limbs shook as if with ague. Meanwhile the major, striding up and down and striking the tables wildly with his fists, continued: "So you have become a thief like the veriest scribbling cur of a clerk, and all for the sake of that creature here! If at least you had stolen for your mother's sake it would have been honorable! But,

curse it, to play tricks and bring the money into this shanty is what I cannot understand! Tell me—what are you made of at your age to go to the dogs as you are going all for the sake of a creature like a grenadier!"

"*You gamble—*" stammered the captain.

"Yes, I do—curse it!" thundered the major, lashed into still greater fury by this remark. "And I am a pitiful rogue to do so, because it swallows up all my pay and doesn't redound to the honor of the French army. However, I don't steal. Kill yourself, if it pleases you; starve your mother and the boy, but respect the regimental cashbox and don't drag your friends down with you."

He stopped. Burle was sitting there with fixed eyes and a stupid air. Nothing was heard for a moment save the clatter of the major's heels.

"And not a single copper," he continued aggressively. "Can you picture yourself between two gendarmes, eh?"

He then grew a little calmer, caught hold of Burle's wrists and forced him to rise.

"Come!" he said gruffly. "Something must be done at once, for I cannot go to bed with this affair on my mind—I have an idea."

In the front room Mélanie and Phrosine were talking eagerly in low voices. When the widow saw the two men leaving the divan she moved toward Burle and said coaxingly: "What, are you going already, Captain?"

"Yes, he's going," brutally answered Laguitte, "and I don't intend to let him set foot here again."

The little maid felt frightened and pulled her mistress back by the skirt of her dress; in doing so she imprudently murmured the word "drunkard" and thereby brought down the slap which the major's hand had been itching to deal for some time past. Both women having stooped, however, the blow only fell on Phrosine's back hair, flattening her cap and breaking her comb. The domino players were indignant.

"Let's cut it," shouted Laguitte, and he pushed Burle on the pavement. "If I remained I should smash everyone in the place."

To cross the square they had to wade up to their ankles in mud. The rain, driven by the wind, poured off their faces. The captain walked on in silence, while the major kept on reproaching him with his cowardice and its disastrous consequences. Wasn't it sweet weather for tramping the streets? If he hadn't been such an idiot they would both be warmly tucked in bed instead of paddling about in the mud. Then he spoke of Gagneux—a scoundrel whose diseased meat had on three separate occasions made the whole regiment ill. In a week, however, the contract would come to an end, and the fiend himself would not get it renewed.

"It rests with me," the major grumbled. "I can select whomsoever I choose, and I'd rather cut off my right arm than put that poisoner in the way of earning another copper."

Just then he slipped into a gutter and, half choked by a string of oaths, he gasped:

"You understand—I am going to rout up Gagneux. You must stop outside while I go in. I must know what the rascal is up to and if he'll dare to

carry out his threat of informing the colonel tomorrow. A butcher—curse him! The idea of compromising oneself with a butcher! Ah, you aren't over-proud, and I shall never forgive you for all this."

They had now reached the Place aux Herbes. Gagneux's house was quite dark, but Laguitte knocked so loudly that he was eventually admitted. Burle remained alone in the dense obscurity and did not even attempt to seek any shelter. He stood at a corner of the market under the pelting rain, his head filled with a loud buzzing noise which prevented him from thinking. He did not feel impatient, for he was unconscious of the flight of time. He stood there looking at the house, which, with its closed door and windows, seemed quite lifeless. When at the end of an hour the major came out again it appeared to the captain as if he had only just gone in.

Laguitte was so grimly mute that Burle did not venture to question him. For a moment they sought each other, groping about in the dark; then they resumed their walk through the somber streets, where the water rolled as in the bed of a torrent. They moved on in silence side by side, the major being so abstracted that he even forgot to swear. However, as they again crossed the Place du Palais, at the sight of the Café de Paris, which was still lit up, he dropped his hand on Burle's shoulder and said, "If you ever re-enter that hole I—"

"No fear!" answered the captain without letting his friend finish his sentence.

Then he stretched out his hand.

"No, no," said Laguitte, "I'll see you home; I'll at least make sure that you'll sleep in your bed tonight."

They went on, and as they ascended the Rue des Recollets they slackened their pace. When the captain's door was reached and Burle had taken out his latchkey he ventured to ask:

"Well?"

"Well," answered the major gruffly, "I am as dirty a rogue as you are. Yes! I have done a scurrilous thing. The fiend take you! Our soldiers will eat carrion for three months longer."

Then he explained that Gagneux, the disgusting Gagneux, had a horribly level head and that he had persuaded him—the major—to strike a bargain. He would refrain from informing the colonel, and he would even make a present of the two thousand francs and replace the forged receipts by genuine ones, on condition that the major bound himself to renew the meat contract. It was a settled thing.

"Ah," continued Laguitte, "calculate what profits the brute must make out of the meat to part with such a sum as two thousand francs."

Burle, choking with emotion, grasped his old friend's hands, stammering confused words of thanks. The vileness of the action committed for his sake brought tears into his eyes.

"I never did such a thing before," growled Laguitte, "but I was driven to it. Curse it, to think that I haven't those two thousand francs in my drawer!

It is enough to make one hate cards. It is my own fault. I am not worth much; only, mark my words, don't begin again, for, curse it—I shan't."

The captain embraced him, and when he had entered the house the major stood a moment before the closed door to make certain that he had gone upstairs to bed. Then as midnight was striking and the rain was still belaboring the dark town, he slowly turned homeward. The thought of his men almost broke his heart, and, stopping short, he said aloud in a voice full of compassion:

"Poor devils! what a lot of cow beef they'll have to swallow for those two thousand francs!"

CHAPTER III

AGAIN?

THE REGIMENT was altogether nonplused: Petticoat Burle had quarreled with Mélanie. When a week had elapsed it became a proved and undeniable fact; the captain no longer set foot inside the Café de Paris, where the chemist, it was averred, once more reigned in his stead, to the profound sorrow of the retired magistrate. An even more incredible statement was that Captain Burle led the life of a recluse in the Rue des Recollets. He was becoming a reformed character; he spent his evenings at his own fireside, hearing little Charles repeat his lessons. His mother, who had never breathed a word to him of his manipulations with Gagneux, maintained her old severity of demeanor as she sat opposite to him in her armchair, but her looks seemed to imply that she believed him reclaimed.

A fortnight later Major Laguitte came one evening to invite himself to dinner. He felt some awkwardness at the prospect of meeting Burle again, not on his own account but because he dreaded awakening painful memories. However, as the captain was mending his ways he wished to shake hands and break a crust with him. He thought this would please his old friend.

When Laguitte arrived Burle was in his room, so it was the old lady who received the major. The latter, after announcing that he had come to have a plate of soup with them, added, lowering his voice:

"Well, how goes it?"

"It is all right," answered the old lady.

"Nothing queer?"

"Absolutely nothing. Never away—in bed at nine—and looking quite happy."

"Ah, confound it," replied the major, "I knew very well he only wanted a shaking. He has some heart left, the dog!"

When Burle appeared he almost crushed the major's hands in his grasp, and standing before the fire, waiting for the dinner, they conversed peacefully, honestly, together, extolling the charms of home life. The captain vowed he wouldn't exchange his home for a kingdom and declared that when he had removed his braces, put on his slippers and settled himself in his armchair, no king was fit to hold a candle to him. The major assented and examined

him. At all events his virtuous conduct had not made him any thinner; he still looked bloated; his eyes were bleared, and his mouth was heavy. He seemed to be half asleep as he repeated mechanically: "Home life! There's nothing like home life, nothing in the world!"

"No doubt," said the major; "still, one mustn't exaggerate—take a little exercise and come to the café now and then."

"To the café, why?" asked Burle. "Do I lack anything here? No, no, I remain at home."

When Charles had laid his books aside Laguitte was surprised to see a maid come in to lay the cloth.

"So you keep a servant now," he remarked to Mme Burle.

"I had to get one," she answered with a sigh. "My legs are not what they used to be, and the household was going to rack and ruin. Fortunately Cabrol let me have his daughter. You know old Cabrol, who sweeps the market? He did not know what to do with Rose—I am teaching her how to work."

Just then the girl left the room.

"How old is she?" asked the major.

"Barely seventeen. She is stupid and dirty, but I only give her ten francs a month, and she eats nothing but soup."

When Rose returned with an armful of plates Laguitte, though he did not care about women, began to scrutinize her and was amazed at seeing so ugly a creature. She was very short, very dark and slightly deformed, with a face like an ape's: a flat nose, a huge mouth and narrow greenish eyes. Her broad back and long arms gave her an appearance of great strength.

"What a snout!" said Laguitte, laughing, when the maid had again left the room to fetch the cruets.

"Never mind," said Burle carelessly, "she is very obliging and does all one asks her. She suits us well enough as a scullion."

The dinner was very pleasant. It consisted of boiled beef and mutton hash. Charles was encouraged to relate some stories of his school, and Mme Burle repeatedly asked him the same question: "Don't you want to be a soldier?" A faint smile hovered over the child's wan lips as he answered with the frightened obedience of a trained dog, "Oh yes, Grandmother." Captain Burle, with his elbows on the table, was masticating slowly with an absent-minded expression. The big room was getting warmer; the single lamp placed on the table left the corners in vague gloom. There was a certain amount of heavy comfort, the familiar intimacy of penurious people who do not change their plates at every course but become joyously excited at the unexpected appearance of a bowl of whipped egg cream at the close of the meal.

Rose, whose heavy tread shook the floor as she paced round the table, had not yet opened her mouth. At last she stopped behind the captain's chair and asked in a gruff voice: "Cheese, sir?"

Burle started. "What, eh? Oh yes—cheese. Hold the plate tight."

He cut a piece of Gruyère, the girl watching him the while with her narrow eyes. Laguitte laughed; Rose's unparalleled ugliness amused him immensely. He whispered in the captain's ear, "She is ripping! There never was

such a nose and such a mouth! You ought to send her to the colonel's someday as a curiosity. It would amuse him to see her."

More and more struck by this phenomenal ugliness, the major felt a paternal desire to examine the girl more closely.

"Come here," he said, "I want some cheese too."

She brought the plate, and Laguitte, sticking the knife in the Gruyère, stared at her, grinning the while because he discovered that she had one nostril broader than the other. Rose gravely allowed herself to be looked at, waiting till the gentleman had done laughing.

She removed the cloth and disappeared. Burle immediately went to sleep in the chimney corner while the major and Mme Burle began to chat. Charles had returned to his exercises. Quietude fell from the loft ceiling; the quietude of a middle-class household gathered in concord around their fireside. At nine o'clock Burle woke up, yawned and announced that he was going off to bed; he apologized but declared that he could not keep his eyes open. Half an hour later, when the major took his leave, Mme Burle vainly called for Rose to light him downstairs; the girl must have gone up to her room; she was, indeed, a regular hen, snoring the round of the clock without waking.

"No need to disturb anybody," said Laguitte on the landing; "my legs are not much better than yours, but if I get hold of the banisters I shan't break any bones. Now, my dear lady, I leave you happy; your troubles are ended at last. I watched Burle closely, and I'll take my oath that he's guileless as a child. Dash it—after all, it was high time for Petticoat Burle to reform; he was going downhill fast."

The major went away fully satisfied with the house and its inmates; the walls were of glass and could harbor no equivocal conduct. What particularly delighted him in his friend's return to virtue was that it absolved him from the obligation of verifying the accounts. Nothing was more distasteful to him than the inspection of a number of ledgers, and as long as Burle kept steady, he—Laguitte—could smoke his pipe in peace and sign the books in all confidence. However, he continued to keep one eye open for a little while longer and found the receipts genuine, the entries correct, the columns admirably balanced. A month later he contented himself with glancing at the receipts and running his eye over the totals. Then one morning, without the slightest suspicion of there being anything wrong, simply because he had lit a second pipe and had nothing to do, he carelessly added up a row of figures and fancied that he detected an error of thirteen francs. The balance seemed perfectly correct, and yet he was not mistaken; the total outlay was thirteen francs more than the various sums for which receipts were furnished. It looked queer, but he said nothing to Burle, just making up his mind to examine the next accounts closely. On the following week he detected a fresh error of nineteen francs, and then, suddenly becoming alarmed, he shut himself up with the books and spent a wretched morning poring over them, perspiring, swearing and feeling as if his very skull were bursting with the figures. At every page he discovered thefts of a few francs—the most miserable petty thefts—ten, eight, eleven francs, latterly, three and four; and, indeed, there was one

column showing that Burle had pilfered just one franc and a half. For two months, however, he had been steadily robbing the cashbox, and by comparing dates the major found to his disgust that the famous lesson respecting Gagneux had only kept him straight for one week! This last discovery infuriated Laguitte, who struck the books with his clenched fists, yelling through a shower of oaths:

"This is more abominable still! At least there was some pluck about those forged receipts of Gagneux. But this time he is as contemptible as a cook charging twopence extra for her cabbages. Powers of hell! To pilfer a franc and a half and clap it in his pocket! Hasn't the brute got any pride then? Couldn't he run away with the safe or play the fool with actresses?"

The pitiful meanness of these pilferings revolted the major, and, moreover, he was enraged at having been duped a second time, deceived by the simple, stupid dodge of falsified additions. He rose at last and paced his office for a whole hour, growling aloud.

"This gives me his measure. Even if I were to thresh him to a jelly every morning he would still drop a couple of coins into his pocket every afternoon. But where can he spend it all? He is never seen abroad; he goes to bed at nine, and everything looks so clean and proper over there. Can the brute have vices that nobody knows of?"

He returned to the desk, added up the subtracted money and found a total of five hundred and forty-five francs. Where was this deficiency to come from? The inspection was close at hand, and if the crotchety colonel should take it into his head to examine a single page, the murder would be out and Burle would be done for.

This idea froze the major, who left off cursing, picturing Mme Burle erect and despairing, and at the same time he felt his heart swell with personal grief and shame.

"Well," he muttered, "I must first of all look into the rogue's business; I will act afterward."

As he walked over to Burle's office he caught sight of a skirt vanishing through the doorway. Fancying that he had a clue to the mystery, he slipped up quietly and listened and speedily recognized Mélanie's shrill voice. She was complaining of the gentlemen of the divan. She had signed a promissory note which she was unable to meet; the bailiffs were in the house, and all her goods would be sold. The captain, however, barely replied to her. He alleged that he had no money, whereupon she burst into tears and began to coax him. But her blandishments were apparently ineffectual, for Burle's husky voice could be heard repeating, "Impossible! Impossible!" And finally the widow withdrew in a towering passion. The major, amazed at the turn affairs were taking, waited a few moments longer before entering the office, where Burle had remained alone. He found him very calm, and despite his furious inclination to call him names he also remained calm, determined to begin by finding out the exact truth.

The office certainly did not look like a swindler's den. A cane-seated chair, covered with an honest leather cushion, stood before the captain's desk, and in

a corner there was the locked safe. Summer was coming on, and the song of a canary sounded through the open window. The apartment was very neat and tidy, redolent of old papers, and altogether its appearance inspired one with confidence.

"Wasn't it Mélanie who was leaving here as I came along?" asked Laguitte.

Burle shrugged his shoulders.

"Yes," he mumbled. "She has been dunning me for two hundred francs, but she can't screw ten out of me—not even tenpence."

"Indeed!" said the major, just to try him. "I heard that you had made up with her."

"I? Certainly not. I have done with the likes of her for good."

Laguitte went away, feeling greatly perplexed. Where had the five hundred and forty-five francs gone? Had the idiot taken to drinking or gambling? He decided to pay Burle a surprise visit that very evening at his own house, and maybe by questioning his mother he might learn something. However, during the afternoon his leg became very painful; latterly he had been feeling in ill-health, and he had to use a stick so as not to limp too outrageously. This stick grieved him sorely, and he declared with angry despair that he was now no better than a pensioner. However, toward the evening, making a strong effort, he pulled himself out of his armchair and, leaning heavily on his stick, dragged himself through the darkness to the Rue des Recollets, which he reached about nine o'clock. The street door was still unlocked, and on going up he stood panting on the third landing, when he heard voices on the upper floor. One of these voices was Burle's, so he fancied, and out of curiosity he ascended another flight of stairs. Then at the end of a passage on the left he saw a ray of light coming from a door which stood ajar. As the creaking of his boots resounded, this door was sharply closed, and he found himself in the dark.

"Some cook going to bed!" he muttered angrily. "I'm a fool."

All the same he groped his way as gently as possible to the door and listened. Two people were talking in the room, and he stood aghast, for it was Burle and that fright Rose! Then he listened, and the conversation he heard left him no doubt of the awful truth. For a moment he lifted his stick as if to beat down the door. Then he shuddered and, staggering back, leaned against the wall. His legs were trembling under him, while in the darkness of the staircase he brandished his stick as if it had been a saber.

What was to be done? After his first moment of passion there had come thoughts of the poor old lady below. And these made him hesitate. It was all over with the captain now; when a man sank as low as that he was hardly worth the few shovelfuls of earth that are thrown over carrion to prevent them from polluting the atmosphere. Whatever might be said of Burle, however much one might try to shame him, he would assuredly begin the next day. Ah, heavens, to think of it! The money! The honor of the army! The name of Burle, that respected name, dragged through the mire! By all that was holy this could and should not be!

Presently the major softened. If he had only possessed five hundred and

forty-five francs! But he had not got such an amount. On the previous day he had drunk too much cognac, just like a mere sub, and had lost shockingly at cards. It served him right—he ought to have known better! And if he was so lame he richly deserved it too; by rights, in fact, his leg ought to be much worse.

At last he crept downstairs and rang at the bell of Mme Burle's flat. Five minutes elapsed, and then the old lady appeared.

"I beg your pardon for keeping you waiting," she said; "I thought that dormouse Rose was still about. I must go and shake her."

But the major detained her.

"Where is Burle?" he asked.

"Oh, he has been snoring since nine o'clock. Would you like to knock at his door?"

"No, no, I only wanted to have a chat with you."

In the parlor Charles sat at his usual place, having just finished his exercises. He looked terrified, and his poor little white hands were tremulous. In point of fact, his grandmother, before sending him to bed, was wont to read some martial stories aloud so as to develop the latent family heroism in his bosom. That night she had selected the episode of the Vengeur, the man-of-war freighted with dying heroes and sinking into the sea. The child, while listening, had become almost hysterical, and his head was racked as with some ghastly nightmare.

Mme Burle asked the major to let her finish the perusal. "Long live the republic!" She solemnly closed the volume. Charles was as white as a sheet.

"You see," said the old lady, "the duty of every French soldier is to die for his country."

"Yes, Grandmother."

Then the lad kissed her on the forehead and, shivering with fear, went to bed in his big room, where the faintest creak of the paneling threw him into a cold sweat.

The major had listened with a grave face. Yes, by heavens! Honor was honor, and he would never permit that wretched Burle to disgrace the old woman and the boy! As the lad was so devoted to the military profession, it was necessary that he should be able to enter Saint-Cyr with his head erect.

When Mme Burle took up the lamp to show the major out, she passed the door of the captain's room, and stopped short, surprised to see the key outside, which was a most unusual occurrence.

"Do go in," she said to Laguitte; "it is bad for him to sleep so much."

And before he could interpose she had opened the door and stood transfixed on finding the room empty. Laguitte turned crimson and looked so foolish that she suddenly understood everything, enlightened by the sudden recollection of several little incidents to which she had previously attached no importance.

"You knew it—you knew it!" she stammered. "Why was I not told? Oh, my God, to think of it! Ah, he has been stealing again—I feel it!"

She remained erect, white and rigid. Then she added in a harsh voice:

"Look you—I wish he were dead!"

Laguitte caught hold of both her hands, which for a moment he kept tightly clasped in his own. Then he left her hurriedly, for he felt a lump rising in his throat and tears coming to his eyes. Ah, by all the powers, this time his mind was quite made up.

CHAPTER IV

INSPECTION

THE REGIMENTAL INSPECTION was to take place at the end of the month. The major had ten days before him. On the very next morning, however, he crawled, limping, as far as the Café de Paris, where he ordered some beer. Mélanie grew pale when she saw him enter, and it was with a lively recollection of a certain slap that Phrosine hastened to serve him. The major seemed very calm, however; he called for a second chair to rest his bad leg upon and drank his beer quietly like any other thirsty man. He had sat there for about an hour when he saw two officers crossing the Place du Palais—Morandot, who commanded one of the battalions of the regiment, and Captain Doucet. Thereupon he excitedly waved his cane and shouted: "Come in and have a glass of beer with me!"

The officers dared not refuse, but when the maid had brought the beer Morandot said to the major: "So you patronize this place now?"

"Yes—the beer is good."

Captain Doucet winked and asked archly: "Do you belong to the divan, Major?"

Laguitte chuckled but did not answer. Then the others began to chaff him about Mélanie, and he took their remarks good-naturedly, simply shrugging his shoulders. The widow was undoubtedly a fine woman, however much people might talk. Some of those who disparaged her would, in reality, be only too pleased to win her good graces. Then turning to the little counter and assuming an engaging air, he shouted:

"Three more glasses, madame."

Mélanie was so taken aback that she rose and brought the beer herself. The major detained her at the table and forgot himself so far as to softly pat the hand which she had carelessly placed on the back of a chair. Used as she was to alternate brutality and flattery, she immediately became confident, believing in a sudden whim of gallantry on the part of the "old wreck," as she was wont to style the major when talking with Phrosine. Doucet and Morandot looked at each other in surprise. Was the major actually stepping into Petticoat Burle's shoes? The regiment would be convulsed if that were the case.

Suddenly, however, Laguitte, who kept his eye on the square, gave a start.

"Hallo, there's Burle!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, it is his time," explained Phrosine. "The captain passes every afternoon on his way from the office."

In spite of his lameness the major had risen to his feet, pushing aside the chairs as he called out: "Burle! I say—come along and have a glass."

The captain, quite aghast and unable to understand why Laguitte was at the widow's, advanced mechanically. He was so perplexed that he again hesitated at the door.

"Another glass of beer," ordered the major, and then turning to Burle, he added, "What's the matter with you? Come in. Are you afraid of being eaten alive?"

The captain took a seat, and an awkward pause followed. Mélanie, who brought the beer with trembling hands, dreaded some scene which might result in the closing of her establishment. The major's gallantry made her uneasy, and she endeavored to slip away, but he invited her to drink with them, and before she could refuse he had ordered Phrosine to bring a liqueur glass of anisette, doing so with as much coolness as if he had been master of the house. Mélanie was thus compelled to sit down between the captain and Laguitte, who exclaimed aggressively: "I *will* have ladies respected. We are French officers! Let us drink Madame's health!"

Burle, with his eyes fixed on his glass, smiled in an embarrassed way. The two officers, shocked at the proceedings, had already tried to get off. Fortunately the café was deserted, save that the domino players were having their afternoon game. At every fresh oath which came from the major they glanced around, scandalized by such an unusual accession of customers and ready to threaten Mélanie that they would leave her for the Café de la Gare if the soldiery was going to invade her place like flies that buzzed about, attracted by the stickiness of the tables which Phrosine scoured only on Saturdays. She was now reclining behind the counter, already reading a novel again.

"How's this—you are not drinking with Madame?" roughly said the major to Burle. "Be civil at least!"

Then as Doucet and Morandot were again preparing to leave, he stopped them.

"Why can't you wait? We'll go together. It is only this brute who never knows how to behave himself."

The two officers looked surprised at the major's sudden bad temper. Mélanie attempted to restore peace and with a light laugh placed her hands on the arms of both men. However, Laguitte disengaged himself.

"No," he roared, "leave me alone. Why does he refuse to chink glasses with you? I shall not allow you to be insulted—do you hear? I am quite sick of him."

Burle, paling under the insult, turned slightly and said to Morandot, "What does this mean? He calls me in here to insult me. Is he drunk?"

With a wild oath the major rose on his trembling legs and struck the captain's cheek with his open hand. Mélanie dived and thus escaped one half of the smack. An appalling uproar ensued. Phrosine screamed behind the counter as if she herself had received the blow; the domino players also entrenched themselves behind their table in fear lest the soldiers should draw their swords and massacre them. However, Doucet and Morandot pinioned

the captain to prevent him from springing at the major's throat and forcibly let him to the door. When they got him outside they succeeded in quieting him a little by repeating that Laguitte was quite in the wrong. They would lay the affair before the colonel, having witnessed it, and the colonel would give his decision. As soon as they had got Burle away they returned to the café where they found Laguitte in reality greatly disturbed, with tears in his eyes but affecting stolid indifference and slowly finishing his beer.

"Listen, Major," began Morandot, "that was very wrong on your part. The captain is your inferior in rank, and you know that he won't be allowed to fight you."

"That remains to be seen," answered the major.

"But how has he offended you? He never uttered a word. Two old comrades too; it is absurd."

The major made a vague gesture. "No matter. He annoyed me."

He could never be made to say anything else. Nothing more as to his motive was ever known. All the same, the scandal was a terrible one. The regiment was inclined to believe that Mélanie, incensed by the captain's defection, had contrived to entrap the major, telling him some abominable stories and prevailing upon him to insult and strike Burle publicly. Who would have thought it of that old foggy Laguitte, who professed to be a woman hater? they said. So he, too, had been caught at last. Despite the general indignation against Mélanie, this adventure made her very conspicuous, and her establishment soon drove a flourishing business.

On the following day the colonel summoned the major and the captain into his presence. He censured them sternly, accusing them of disgracing their uniform by frequenting unseemly haunts. What resolution had they come to, he asked, as he could not authorize them to fight? This same question had occupied the whole regiment for the last twenty-four hours. Apologies were unacceptable on account of the blow, but as Laguitte was almost unable to stand, it was hoped that, should the colonel insist upon it, some reconciliation might be patched up.

"Come," said the colonel, "will you accept me as arbitrator?"

"I beg your pardon, Colonel," interrupted the major; "I have brought you my resignation. Here it is. That settles everything. Please name the day for the duel."

Burle looked at Laguitte in amazement, and the colonel thought it his duty to protest.

"This is a most serious step, Major," he began. "Two years more and you would be entitled to your full pension."

But again did Laguitte cut him short, saying gruffly, "That is my own affair."

"Oh, certainly! Well, I will send in your resignation, and as soon as it is accepted I will fix a day for the duel."

The unexpected turn that events had taken startled the regiment. What possessed that lunatic major to persist in cutting the throat of his old comrade Burle? The officers again discussed Mélanie; they even began to dream of

her. There must surely be something wonderful about her since she had completely fascinated two such tough old veterans and brought them to a deadly feud. Morandot, having met Laguitte, did not disguise his concern. If he—the major—was not killed, what would he live upon? He had no fortune, and the pension to which his cross of the Legion of Honor entitled him, with the half of a full regimental pension which he would obtain on resigning, would barely find him in bread. While Morandot was thus speaking Laguitte simply stared before him with his round eyes, persevering in the dumb obstinacy born of his narrow mind; and when his companion tried to question him regarding his hatred for Burle, he simply made the same vague gesture as before and once again repeated:

“He annoyed me; so much the worse.”

Every morning at mess and at the canteen the first words were: “Has the acceptance of the major’s resignation arrived?” The duel was impatiently expected and ardently discussed. The majority believed that Laguitte would be run through the body in three seconds, for it was madness for a man to fight with a paralyzed leg which did not even allow him to stand upright. A few, however, shook their heads. Laguitte had never been a marvel of intellect, that was true; for the last twenty years, indeed, he had been held up as an example of stupidity, but there had been a time when he was known as the best fencer of the regiment, and although he had begun as a drummer he had won his epaulets as the commander of a battalion by the sanguine bravery of a man who is quite unconscious of danger. On the other hand, Burle fenced indifferently and passed for a poltroon. However, they would soon know what to think.

Meanwhile the excitement became more and more intense as the acceptance of Laguitte’s resignation was so long in coming. The major was unmistakably the most anxious and upset of everybody. A week had passed by, and the general inspection would commence two days later. Nothing, however, had come as yet. He shuddered at the thought that he had, perhaps, struck his old friend and sent in his resignation all in vain, without delaying the exposure for a single minute. He had in reality reasoned thus: If he himself were killed he would not have the worry of witnessing the scandal, and if he killed Burle, as he expected to do, the affair would undoubtedly be hushed up. Thus he would save the honor of the army, and the little chap would be able to get in at Saint-Cyr. Ah, why wouldn’t those wretched scribblers at the War Office hurry up a bit? The major could not keep still but was forever wandering about before the post office, stopping the estafettes and questioning the colonel’s orderly to find out if the acceptance had arrived. He lost his sleep and, careless as to people’s remarks, he leaned more and more heavily on his stick, hobbling about with no attempt to steady his gait.

On the day before that fixed for the inspection he was, as usual, on his way to the colonel’s quarters when he paused, startled, to see Mme Burle (who was taking Charles to school) a few paces ahead of him. He had not met her since the scene at the Café de Paris, for she had remained in seclusion at home. Unmanned at thus meeting her, he stepped down to leave the whole sidewalk

free. Neither he nor the old lady bowed, and the little boy lifted his large inquisitive eyes in mute surprise. Mme Burle, cold and erect, brushed past the major without the least sign of emotion or recognition. When she had passed he looked after her with an expression of stupefied compassion.

"Confound it, I am no longer a man," he growled, dashing away a tear.

When he arrived at the colonel's quarters a captain in attendance greeted him with the words: "It's all right at last. The papers have come."

"Ah!" murmured Laguitte, growing very pale.

And again he beheld the old lady walking on, relentlessly rigid and holding the little boy's hand. What! He had longed so eagerly for those papers for eight days past, and now when the scraps had come he felt his brain on fire and his heart lacerated.

The duel took place on the morrow, in the barrack yard behind a low wall. The air was keen, the sun shining brightly. Laguitte had almost to be carried to the ground; one of his seconds supported him on one side, while on the other he leaned heavily, on his stick. Burle looked half asleep; his face was puffy with unhealthy fat, as if he had spent a night of debauchery. Not a word was spoken. They were all anxious to have it over.

Captain Doucet crossed the swords of the two adversaries and then drew back, saying: "Set to, gentlemen."

Burle was the first to attack; he wanted to test Laguitte's strength and ascertain what he had to expect. For the last ten days the encounter had seemed to him a ghastly nightmare which he could not fathom. At times a hideous suspicion assailed him, but he put it aside with terror, for it meant death, and he refused to believe that a friend could play him such a trick, even to set things right. Besides, Laguitte's leg reassured him; he would prick the major on the shoulder, and then all would be over.

During well-nigh a couple of minutes the swords clashed, and then the captain lunged, but the major, recovering his old suppleness of wrist, parried in a masterly style, and if he had returned the attack Burle would have been pierced through. The captain now fell back; he was livid, for he felt that he was at the mercy of the man who had just spared him. At last he understood that this was an execution.

Laguitte, squarely poised on his infirm legs and seemingly turned to stone, stood waiting. The two men looked at each other fixedly. In Burle's blurred eyes there arose a supplication—a prayer for pardon. He knew why he was going to die, and like a child he promised not to transgress again. But the major's eyes remained implacable; honor had spoken, and he silenced his emotion and his pity.

"Let it end," he muttered between his teeth.

Then it was he who attacked. Like a flash of lightning his sword flamed, flying from right to left, and then with a resistless thrust it pierced the breast of the captain, who fell like a log without even a groan.

Laguitte had released his hold upon his sword and stood gazing at that poor old rascal Burle, who was stretched upon his back with his fat stomach bulging out.

"Oh, my God! My God!" repeated the major furiously and despairingly, and then he began to swear.

They led him away, and, both his legs failing him, he had to be supported on either side, for he could not even use his stick.

Two months later the ex-major was crawling slowly along in the sunlight down a lonely street of Vauchamp, when he again found himself face to face with Mme Burle and little Charles. They were both in deep mourning. He tried to avoid them, but he now only walked with difficulty, and they advanced straight upon him without hurrying or slackening their steps. Charles still had the same gentle, girlish, frightened face, and Mme Burle retained her stern, rigid demeanor, looking even harsher than ever.

As Laguitte shrank into the corner of a doorway to leave the whole street to them, she abruptly stopped in front of him and stretched out her hand. He hesitated and then took it and pressed it, but he trembled so violently that he made the old lady's arm shake. They exchanged glances in silence.

"Charles," said the boy's grandmother at last, "shake hands with the major."

The boy obeyed without understanding. The major, who was very pale, barely ventured to touch the child's frail fingers; then, feeling that he ought to speak, he stammered out: "You still intend to send him to Saint-Cyr?"

"Of course, when he is old enough," answered Mme Burle.

But during the following week Charles was carried off by typhoid fever. One evening his grandmother had again read him the story of the Vengeur to make him bold, and in the night he had become delirious. The poor little fellow died of fright.

THE DEATH OF OLIVIER BECAILLE

CHAPTER I

MY PASSING

It was on a Saturday, at six in the morning, that I died after a three days' illness. My wife was searching a trunk for some linen, and when she rose and turned she saw me rigid, with open eyes and silent pulses. She ran to me, fancying that I had fainted, touched my hands and bent over me. Then she suddenly grew alarmed, burst into tears and stammered:

"My God, my God! He is dead!"

I heard everything, but the sounds seemed to come from a great distance. My left eye still detected a faint glimmer, a whitish light in which all objects melted, but my right eye was quite bereft of sight. It was the coma of my whole being, as if a thunderbolt had struck me. My will was annihilated; not a fiber of flesh obeyed my bidding. And yet amid the impotency of my inert limbs my thoughts subsisted, sluggish and lazy, still perfectly clear.

My poor Marguerite was crying; she had dropped on her knees beside the bed, repeating in heart-rending tones:

"He is dead! My God, he is dead!"

Was this strange state of torpor, this immobility of the flesh, really death, although the functions of the intellect were not arrested? Was my soul only lingering for a brief space before it soared away forever? From my childhood upward I had been subject to hysterical attacks, and twice in early youth I had nearly succumbed to nervous fevers. By degrees all those who surrounded me had got accustomed to consider me an invalid and to see me sickly. So much so that I myself had forbidden my wife to call in a doctor when I had taken to my bed on the day of our arrival at the cheap lodginghouse of the Rue Dauphine in Paris. A little rest would soon set me right again; it was only the fatigue of the journey which had caused my intolerable weariness. And yet I was conscious of having felt singularly uneasy. We had left our province somewhat abruptly; we were very poor and had barely enough money to support ourselves till I drew my first month's salary in the office where I had obtained a situation. And now a sudden seizure was carrying me off!

Was it really death? I had pictured to myself a darker night, a deeper silence. As a little child I had already felt afraid to die. Being weak and compassionately petted by everyone, I had concluded that I had not long to live, that I should soon be buried, and the thought of the cold earth filled me with a dread I could not master—a dread which haunted me day and night. As I grew older the same terror pursued me. Sometimes, after long hours spent in reasoning with myself, I thought that I had conquered my fear. I reflected, "After all, what does it matter? One dies and all is over. It is the common fate; nothing could be better or easier."

I then prodded myself on being able to look death boldly in the face, but suddenly a shiver froze my blood, and my dizzy anguish returned, as if a giant hand had swung me over a dark abyss. It was some vision of the earth

returning and setting reason at naught. How often at night did I start up in bed, not knowing what cold breath had swept over my slumbers but clasping my despairing hands and moaning, "Must I die?" In those moments an icy horror would stop my pulses while an appalling vision of dissolution rose before me. It was with difficulty that I could get to sleep again. Indeed, sleep alarmed me; it so closely resembled death. If I closed my eyes they might never open again—I might slumber on forever.

I cannot tell if others have endured the same torture; I only know that my own life was made a torment by it. Death ever rose between me and all I loved; I can remember how the thought of it poisoned the happiest moments I spent with Marguerite. During the first months of our married life, when she lay sleeping by my side and I dreamed of a fair future for her and with her, the foreboding of some fatal separation dashed my hopes aside and embittered my delights. Perhaps we should be parted on the morrow—nay, perhaps in an hour's time. Then utter discouragement assailed me; I wondered what the bliss of being united availed me if it were to end in so cruel a disruption.

My morbid imagination reveled in scenes of mourning. I speculated as to who would be the first to depart, Marguerite or I. Either alternative caused me harrowing grief, and tears rose to my eyes at the thought of our shattered lives. At the happiest periods of my existence I often became a prey to grim dejection such as nobody could understand but which was caused by the thought of impending nihilism. When I was most successful I was to general wonder most depressed. The fatal question, "What avails it?" rang like a knell in my ears. But the sharpest sting of this torment was that it came with a secret sense of shame, which rendered me unable to confide my thoughts to another. Husband and wife lying side by side in the darkened room may quiver with the same shudder and yet remain mute, for people do not mention death any more than they pronounce certain obscene words. Fear makes it nameless.

I was musing thus while my dear Marguerite knelt sobbing at my feet. It grieved me sorely to be unable to comfort her by telling her that I suffered no pain. If death were merely the annihilation of the flesh it had been foolish of me to harbor so much dread. I experienced a selfish kind of restfulness in which all my cares were forgotten. My memory had become extraordinarily vivid. My whole life passed before me rapidly like a play in which I no longer acted a part; it was a curious and enjoyable sensation—I seemed to hear a far-off voice relating my own history.

I saw in particular a certain spot in the country near Guérande, on the way to Piriac. The road turns sharply, and some scattered pine trees carelessly dot a rocky slope. When I was seven years old I used to pass through those pines with my father as far as a crumbling old house, where Marguerite's parents gave me pancakes. They were salt gatherers and earned a scanty livelihood by working the adjacent salt marshes. Then I remembered the school at Nantes, where I had grown up, leading a monotonous life within its ancient

walls and yearning for the broad horizon of Guérande and the salt marshes stretching to the limitless sea widening under the sky.

Next came a blank—my father was dead. I entered the hospital as clerk to the managing board and led a dreary life with one solitary diversion: my Sunday visits to the old house on Piriac road. The saltworks were doing badly; poverty reigned in the land, and Marguerite's parents were nearly penniless. Marguerite, when merely a child, had been fond of me because I trundled her about in a wheelbarrow, but on the morning when I asked her in marriage she shrank from me with a frightened gesture, and I realized that she thought me hideous. Her parents, however, consented at once; they looked upon my offer as a godsend, and the daughter submissively acquiesced. When she became accustomed to the idea of marrying me she did not seem to dislike it so much. On our wedding day at Guérande the rain fell in torrents, and when we got home my bride had to take off her dress, which was soaked through, and sit in her petticoats.

That was all the youth I ever had. We did not remain long in our province. One day I found my wife in tears. She was miserable; life was so dull; she wanted to get away. Six months later I had saved a little money by taking in extra work after office hours, and through the influence of a friend of my father's I obtained a petty appointment in Paris. I started off to settle there with the dear little woman so that she might cry no more. During the night, which we spent in the third-class railway carriage, the seats being very hard, I took her in my arms in order that she might sleep.

That was the past, and now I had just died on the narrow couch of a Paris lodginghouse, and my wife was crouching on the floor, crying bitterly. The white light before my left eye was growing dim, but I remembered the room perfectly. On the left there was a chest of drawers, on the right a mantelpiece surmounted by a damaged clock without a pendulum, the hands of which marked ten minutes past ten. The window overlooked the Rue Dauphine, a long, dark street. All Paris seemed to pass below, and the noise was so great that the window shook.

We knew nobody in the city; we had hurried our departure, but I was not expected at the office till the following Monday. Since I had taken to my bed I had wondered at my imprisonment in this narrow room into which we had tumbled after a railway journey of fifteen hours, followed by a hurried, confusing transit through the noisy streets. My wife had nursed me with smiling tenderness, but I knew that she was anxious. She would walk to the window, glance out and return to the bedside, looking very pale and startled by the sight of the busy thoroughfare, the aspect of the vast city of which she did not know a single stone and which deafened her with its continuous roar. What would happen to her if I never woke up again—alone, friendless and unknowing as she was?

Marguerite had caught hold of one of my hands which lay passive on the coverlet, and, covering it with kisses, she repeated wildly: "Olivier, answer me. Oh, my God, he is dead, dead!"

So death was not complete annihilation. I could hear and think. I had been

uselessly alarmed all those years. I had not dropped into utter vacancy as I had anticipated. I could not picture the disappearance of my being, the suppression of all that I had been, without the possibility of renewed existence. I had been wont to shudder whenever in any book or newspaper I came across a date of a hundred years hence. A date at which I should no longer be alive, a future which I should never see, filled me with unspeakable uneasiness. Was I not the whole world, and would not the universe crumble away when I was no more?

To dream of life had been a cherished vision, but this could not possibly be death. I should assuredly awake presently. Yes, in a few moments I would lean over, take Marguerite in my arms and dry her tears. I would rest a little while longer before going to my office, and then a new life would begin, brighter than the last. However, I did not feel impatient; the commotion had been too strong. It was wrong of Marguerite to give way like that when I had not even the strength to turn my head on the pillow and smile at her. The next time that she moaned out, "He is dead! Dead!" I would embrace her and murmur softly so as not to startle her: "No, my darling, I was only asleep. You see, I am alive, and I love you."

CHAPTER II

FUNERAL PREPARATIONS

MARGUERITE'S CRIES had attracted attention, for all at once the door was opened and a voice exclaimed: "What is the matter, neighbor? Is he worse?"

I recognized the voice; it was that of an elderly woman, Mme Gabin, who occupied a room on the same floor. She had been most obliging since our arrival and had evidently become interested in our concerns. On her own side she had lost no time in telling us her history. A stern landlord had sold her furniture during the previous winter to pay himself his rent, and since then she had resided at the lodginghouse in the Rue Dauphine with her daughter Dédé, a child of ten. They both cut and pinked lamp shades, and between them they earned at the utmost only two francs a day.

"Heavens! Is it all over?" cried Mme Gabin, looking at me.

I realized that she was drawing nearer. She examined me, touched me and, turning to Marguerite, murmured compassionately: "Poor girl! Poor girl!"

My wife, wearied out, was sobbing like a child. Mme Gabin lifted her, placed her in a dilapidated armchair near the fireplace and proceeded to comfort her.

"Indeed, you'll do yourself harm if you go on like this, my dear. It's no reason because your husband is gone that you should kill yourself with weeping. Sure enough, when I lost Gabin I was just like you. I remained three days without swallowing a morsel of food. But that didn't help me—on the contrary, it pulled me down. Come, for the Lord's sake, be sensible!"

By degrees Marguerite grew calmer; she was exhausted, and it was only at

intervals that she gave way to a fresh flow of tears. Meanwhile the old woman had taken possession of the room with a sort of rough authority.

"Don't worry yourself," she said as she bustled about. "Neighbors must help each other. Luckily Dédé has just gone to take the work home. Ah, I see your trunks are not yet all unpacked, but I suppose there is some linen in the chest of drawers, isn't there?"

I heard her pull a drawer open; she must have taken out a napkin which she spread on the little table at the bedside. She then struck a match, which made me think that she was lighting one of the candles on the mantelpiece and placing it near me as a religious rite. I could follow her movements in the room and divine all her actions.

"Poor gentleman," she muttered. "Luckily I heard you sobbing, poor dear!"

Suddenly the vague light which my left eye had detected vanished. Mme Gabin had just closed my eyelids, but I had not felt her finger on my face. When I understood this I felt chilled.

The door had opened again, and Dédé, the child of ten, now rushed in, calling out in her shrill voice: "Mother, Mother! Ah, I knew you would be here! Look here, there's the money—three francs and four sous. I took back three dozen lamp shades."

"Hush, hush! Hold your tongue," vainly repeated the mother, who, as the little girl chattered on, must have pointed to the bed, for I guessed that the child felt perplexed and was backing toward the door.

"Is the gentleman asleep?" she whispered.

"Yes, yes—go and play," said Mme Gabin.

But the child did not go. She was, no doubt, staring at me with widely opened eyes, startled and vaguely comprehending. Suddenly she seemed convulsed with terror and ran out, upsetting a chair.

"He is dead, Mother; he is dead!" she gasped.

Profound silence followed. Marguerite, lying back in the armchair, had left off crying. Mme Gabin was still rummaging about the room and talking under her breath.

"Children know everything nowadays. Look at that girl. Heaven knows how carefully she's brought up! When I send her on an errand or take the shades back I calculate the time to a minute so that she can't loiter about, but for all that she learns everything. She saw at a glance what had happened here—and yet I never showed her but one corpse, that of her uncle François, and she was then only four years old. Ah well, there are no children left—it can't be helped."

She paused and without any transition passed to another subject.

"I say, dearie, we must think of the formalities—there's the declaration at the municipal offices to be made and the seeing about the funeral. You are not in a fit state to attend to business. What do you say if I look in at Monsieur Simoneau's to find out if he's at home?"

Marguerite did not reply. It seemed to me that I watched her from afar and at times changed into a subtle flame hovering above the room, while a stranger lay heavy and unconscious on my bed. I wished that Marguerite

had declined the assistance of Simoneau. I had seen him three or four times during my brief illness, for he occupied a room close to ours and had been civil and neighborly. Mme Gabin had told us that he was merely making a short stay in Paris, having come to collect some old debts due to his father, who had settled in the country and recently died. He was a tall, strong, handsome young man, and I hated him, perhaps on account of his healthy appearance. On the previous evening he had come in to make inquiries, and I had much disliked seeing him at Marguerite's side; she had looked so fair and pretty, and he had gazed so intently into her face when she smilingly thanked him for his kindness.

"Ah, here is Monsieur Simoneau," said Mme Gabin, introducing him.

He gently pushed the door ajar, and as soon as Marguerite saw him enter she burst into a flood of tears. The presence of a friend, of the only person she knew in Paris besides the old woman, recalled her bereavement. I could not see the young man, but in the darkness that encompassed me I conjured up his appearance. I pictured him distinctly, grave and sad at finding poor Marguerite in such distress. How lovely she must have looked with her golden hair unbound, her pale face and her dear little baby hands burning with fever!

"I am at your disposal, madame," he said softly. "Pray allow me to manage everything."

She only answered him with broken words, but as the young man was leaving, accompanied by Mme Gabin, I heard the latter mention money. These things were always expensive, she said, and she feared that the poor little body hadn't a farthing—anyhow, he might ask her. But Simoneau silenced the old woman; he did not want to have the widow worried; he was going to the municipal office and to the undertaker's.

When silence reigned once more I wondered if my nightmare would last much longer. I was certainly alive, for I was conscious of passing incidents, and I began to realize my condition. I must have fallen into one of those cataleptic states that I had read of. As a child I had suffered from syncopes which had lasted several hours, but surely my heart would beat anew, my blood circulate and my muscles relax. Yes, I should wake up and comfort Marguerite, and, reasoning thus, I tried to be patient.

Time passed. Mme Gabin had brought in some breakfast, but Marguerite refused to taste any food. Later on the afternoon waned. Through the open window I heard the rising clamor of the Rue Dauphine. By and by a slight ringing of the brass candlestick on the marble-topped table made me think that a fresh candle had been lighted. At last Simoneau returned.

"Well?" whispered the old woman.

"It is all settled," he answered; "the funeral is ordered for tomorrow at eleven. There is nothing for you to do, and you needn't talk of these things before the poor lady."

Nevertheless, Mme Gabin remarked: "The doctor of the dead hasn't come yet."

Simoneau took a seat beside Marguerite and after a few words of encouragement remained silent. The funeral was to take place at eleven! Those

words rang in my brain like a passing bell. And the doctor coming—the doctor of the dead, as Mme Gabin had called him. *He* could not possibly fail to find out that I was only in a state of lethargy; he would do whatever might be necessary to rouse me, so I longed for his arrival with feverish anxiety.

The day was drawing to a close. Mme Gabin, anxious to waste no time, had brought in her lamp shades and summoned Dédé without asking Marguerite's permission. "To tell the truth," she observed, "I do not like to leave children too long alone."

"Come in, I say," she whispered to the little girl; "come in, and don't be frightened. Only don't look toward the bed or you'll catch it."

She thought it decorous to forbid Dédé to look at me, but I was convinced that the child was furtively glancing at the corner where I lay, for every now and then I heard her mother rap her knuckles and repeat angrily: "Get on with your work or you shall leave the room, and the gentleman will come during the night and pull you by the feet."

The mother and daughter had sat down at our table. I could plainly hear the click of their scissors as they clipped the lamp shades, which no doubt required very delicate manipulation, for they did not work rapidly. I counted the shades one by one as they were laid aside, while my anxiety grew more and more intense.

The clicking of the scissors was the only noise in the room, so I concluded that Marguerite had been overcome by fatigue and was dozing. Twice Simoneau rose, and the torturing thought flashed through me that he might be taking advantage of her slumbers to touch her hair with his lips. I hardly knew the man and yet felt sure that he loved my wife. At last little Dédé began to giggle, and her laugh exasperated me.

"Why are you sniggering, you idiot?" asked her mother. "Do you want to be turned out on the landing? Come, out with it; what makes you laugh so?"

The child stammered: she had not laughed; she had only coughed, but I felt certain she had seen Simoneau bending over Marguerite and had felt amused.

The lamp had been lit when a knock was heard at the door.

"It must be the doctor at last," said the old woman.

It was the doctor; he did not apologize for coming so late, for he had no doubt ascended many flights of stairs during the day. The room being but imperfectly lighted by the lamp, he inquired: "Is the body here?"

"Yes, it is," answered Simoneau.

Marguerite had risen, trembling violently. Mme Gabin dismissed Dédé, saying it was useless that a child should be present, and then she tried to lead my wife to the window, to spare her the sight of what was about to take place.

The doctor quickly approached the bed. I guessed that he was bored, tired and impatient. Had he touched my wrist? Had he placed his hand on my heart? I could not tell, but I fancied that he had only carelessly bent over me.

"Shall I bring the lamp so that you may see better?" asked Simoneau obligingly.

"No, it is not necessary," quietly answered the doctor.

Not necessary! That man held my life in his hands, and he did not think it worth while to proceed to a careful examination! I was not dead! I wanted to cry out that I was not dead!

"At what o'clock did he die?" asked the doctor.

"At six this morning," volunteered Simoneau.

A feeling of frenzy and rebellion rose within me, bound as I was in seemingly iron chains. Oh, for the power of uttering one word, of moving a single limb!

"This close weather is unhealthy," resumed the doctor; "nothing is more trying than these early spring days."

And then he moved away. It was like my life departing. Screams, sobs and insults were choking me, struggling in my convulsed throat, in which even my breath was arrested. The wretch! Turned into a mere machine by professional habits, he only came to a deathbed to accomplish a perfunctory formality; he knew nothing; his science was a lie, since he could not at a glance distinguish life from death—and now he was going—going!

"Good night, sir," said Simoneau.

There came a moment's silence; the doctor was probably bowing to Marguerite, who had turned while Mme Gabin was fastening the window. He left the room, and I heard his footsteps descending the stairs.

It was all over; I was condemned. My last hope had vanished with that man. If I did not wake before eleven on the morrow I should be buried alive. The horror of that thought was so great that I lost all consciousness of my surroundings—'twas something like a fainting fit in death. The last sound I heard was the clicking of the scissors handled by Mme Gabin and Dédé. The funeral vigil had begun; nobody spoke.

Marguerite had refused to retire to rest in the neighbor's room. She remained reclining in her armchair, with her beautiful face pale, her eyes closed and her long lashes wet with tears, while before her in the gloom Simoneau sat silently watching her.

CHAPTER III

THE PROCESSION

I CANNOT DESCRIBE my agony during the morning of the following day. I remember it as a hideous dream in which my impressions were so ghastly and so confused that I could not formulate them. The persistent yearning for a sudden awakening increased my torture, and as the hour for the funeral drew nearer my anguish became more poignant still.

It was only at daybreak that I had recovered a fuller consciousness of what was going on around me. The creaking of hinges startled me out of my stupor. Mme Gabin had just opened the window. It must have been about seven o'clock, for I heard the cries of hawkers in the street, the shrill voice of a girl offering groundsel and the hoarse voice of a man shouting "Carrots!" The clamorous awakening of Paris pacified me at first. I could not believe

that I should be laid under the sod in the midst of so much life; and, besides, a sudden thought helped to calm me. It had just occurred to me that I had witnessed a case similar to my own when I was employed at the hospital of Guérande. A man had been sleeping twenty-eight hours, the doctors hesitating in presence of his apparent lifelessness, when suddenly he had sat up in bed and was almost at once able to rise. I myself had already been asleep for some twenty-five hours; if I awoke at ten I should still be in time.

I endeavored to ascertain who was in the room and what was going on there. Dédé must have been playing on the landing, for once when the door opened I heard her shrill childish laughter outside. Simoneau must have retired, for nothing indicated his presence. Mme Gabin's slipshod tread was still audible over the floor. At last she spoke.

"Come, my dear," she said. "It is wrong of you not to take it while it is hot. It would cheer you up."

She was addressing Marguerite, and a slow trickling sound as of something filtering indicated that she had been making some coffee.

"I don't mind owning," she continued, "that I needed it. At my age sitting up is trying. The night seems so dreary when there is a misfortune in the house. *Do* have a cup of coffee, my dear—just a drop."

She persuaded Marguerite to taste it.

"Isn't it nice and hot?" she continued, "and doesn't it set one up? Ah, you'll be wanting all your strength presently for what you've got to go through today. Now if you were sensible you'd step into my room and just wait there."

"No, I want to stay here," said Marguerite resolutely.

Her voice, which I had not heard since the previous evening, touched me strangely. It was changed, broken as by tears. To feel my dear wife near me was a last consolation. I knew that her eyes were fastened on me and that she was weeping with all the anguish of her heart.

The minutes flew by. An inexplicable noise sounded from beyond the door. It seemed as if some people were bringing a bulky piece of furniture upstairs and knocking against the walls as they did so. Suddenly I understood, as I heard Marguerite begin to sob; it was the coffin.

"You are too early," said Mme Gabin crossly. "Put it behind the bed."

What o'clock was it? Nine, perhaps. So the coffin had come. Amid the opaque night around me I could see it plainly, quite new, with roughly planed boards. Heavens! Was this the end then? Was I to be borne off in that box which I realized was lying at my feet?

However, I had one supreme joy. Marguerite, in spite of her weakness, insisted upon discharging all the last offices. Assisted by the old woman, she dressed me with all the tenderness of a wife and a sister. Once more I felt myself in her arms as she clothed me in various garments. She paused at times, overcome by grief; she clasped me convulsively, and her tears rained on my face. Oh, how I longed to return her embrace and cry, "I live!" And yet I was lying there powerless, motionless, inert!

"You are foolish," suddenly said Mme Gabin; "it is all wasted."

"Never mind," answered Marguerite, sobbing. "I want him to wear his very best things."

I understood that she was dressing me in the clothes I had worn on my wedding day. I had kept them carefully for great occasions. When she had finished she fell back exhausted in the armchair.

Simoneau now spoke; he had probably just entered the room.

"They are below," he whispered.

"Well, it ain't any too soon," answered Mme Gabin, also lowering her voice. "Tell them to come up and get it over."

"But I dread the despair of the poor little wife."

The old woman seemed to reflect and presently resumed: "Listen to me, Monsieur Simoneau. You must take her off to my room. I wouldn't have her stop here. It is for her own good. When she is out of the way we'll get it done in a jiffy."

These words pierced my heart, and my anguish was intense when I realized that a struggle was actually taking place. Simoneau had walked up to Marguerite, imploring her to leave the room.

"Do, for pity's sake, come with me!" he pleaded. "Spare yourself useless pain."

"No, no!" she cried. "I will remain till the last minute. Remember that I have only him in the world, and when he is gone I shall be all alone!"

From the bedside Mme Gabin was prompting the young man.

"Don't parley—take hold of her, carry her off in your arms."

Was Simoneau about to lay his hands on Marguerite and bear her away? She screamed. I wildly endeavored to rise, but the springs of my limbs were broken. I remained rigid, unable to lift my eyelids to see what was going on. The struggle continued, and my wife clung to the furniture, repeating, "Oh, don't, don't! Have mercy! Let me go! I will not—"

He must have lifted her in his stalwart arms, for I heard her moaning like a child. He bore her away; her sobs were lost in the distance, and I fancied I saw them both—he, tall and strong, pressing her to his breast; she, fainting, powerless and conquered, following him wherever he listed.

"Drat it all! What a to-do!" muttered Mme Gabin. "Now for the tug of war, as the coast is clear at last."

In my jealous madness I looked upon this incident as a monstrous outrage. I had not been able to see Marguerite for twenty-four hours, but at least I had still heard her voice. Now even this was denied me; she had been torn away; a man had eloped with her even before I was laid under the sod. He was alone with her on the other side of the wall, comforting her—embracing her, perhaps!

But the door opened once more, and heavy footsteps shook the floor.

"Quick, make haste," repeated Mme Gabin. "Get it done before the lady comes back."

She was speaking to some strangers, who merely answered her with uncouth grunts.

"You understand," she went on, "I am not a relation; I'm only a neighbor."

I have no interest in the matter. It is out of pure good nature that I have mixed myself up in their affairs. And I ain't overcheerful, I can tell you. Yes, yes, I sat up the whole blessed night—it was pretty cold, too, about four o'clock. That's a fact. Well, I have always been a fool—I'm too soft-hearted."

The coffin had been dragged into the center of the room. As I had not awakened I was condemned. All clearness departed from my ideas; everything seemed to revolve in a black haze, and I experienced such utter lassitude that it seemed almost a relief to leave off hoping.

"They haven't spared the material," said one of the undertaker's men in a gruff voice. "The box is too long."

"He'll have all the more room," said the other, laughing.

I was not heavy, and they chuckled over it since they had three flights of stairs to descend. As they were seizing me by the shoulders and feet I heard Mme Gabin fly into a violent passion.

"You cursed little brat," she screamed, "what do you mean by poking your nose where you're not wanted? Look here, I'll teach you to spy and pry."

Dédé had slipped her tousled head through the doorway to see how the gentleman was being put into the box. Two ringing slaps resounded, however, by an explosion of sobs. And as soon as the mother returned she began to gossip about her daughter for the benefit of the two men who were settling me in the coffin.

"She is only ten, you know. She is not a bad girl, but she is frightfully inquisitive. I do not beat her often; only I *will* be obeyed."

"Oh," said one of the men, "all kids are alike. Whenever there is a corpse lying about they always want to see it."

I was commodiously stretched out, and I might have thought myself still in bed, had it not been that my left arm felt a trifle cramped from being squeezed against a board. The men had been right. I was pretty comfortable inside on account of my diminutive stature.

"Stop!" suddenly exclaimed Mme Gabin. "I promised his wife to put a pillow under his head."

The men, who were in a hurry, stuffed in the pillow roughly. One of them, who had mislaid his hammer, began to swear. He had left the tool below and went to fetch it, dropping the lid, and when two sharp blows of the hammer drove in the first nail, a shock ran through my being—I had ceased to live. The nails then entered in rapid succession with a rhythmical cadence. It was as if some packers had been closing a case of dried fruit with easy dexterity. After that such sounds as reached me were deadened and strangely prolonged, as if the deal coffin had been changed into a huge musical box. The last words spoken in the room of the Rue Dauphine—at least the last ones that I heard distinctly—were uttered by Mme Gabin.

"Mind the staircase," she said; "the banister of the second flight isn't safe, so be careful."

While I was being carried down I experienced a sensation similar to that of pitching, as when one is on board a ship in a rough sea. However, from

that moment my impressions became more and more vague. I remember that the only distinct thought that still possessed me was an imbecile, impulsive curiosity as to the road by which I should be taken to the cemetery. I was not acquainted with a single street of Paris, and I was ignorant of the position of the large burial grounds (though of course I had occasionally heard their names), and yet every effort of my mind was directed toward ascertaining whether we were turning to the right or to the left. Meanwhile the jolting of the hearse over the paving stones, the rumbling of passing vehicles, the steps of the foot passengers, all created a confused clamor, intensified by the acoustical properties of the coffin.

At first I followed our course pretty closely; then came a halt. I was again lifted and carried about, and I concluded that we were in church, but when the funeral procession once more moved onward I lost all consciousness of the road we took. A ringing of bells informed me that we were passing another church, and then the softer and easier progress of the wheels indicated that we were skirting a garden or park. I was like a victim being taken to the gallows, awaiting in stupor a deathblow that never came.

At last they stopped and pulled me out of the hearse. The business proceeded rapidly. The noises had ceased; I knew that I was in a deserted space amid avenues of trees and with the broad sky over my head. No doubt a few persons followed the bier, some of the inhabitants of the lodginghouse, perhaps—Simoneau and others, for instance—for faint whisperings reached my ear. Then I heard a psalm chanted and some Latin words mumbled by a priest, and afterward I suddenly felt myself sinking, while the ropes rubbing against the edges of the coffin elicited lugubrious sounds, as if a bow were being drawn across the strings of a cracked violoncello. It was the end. On the left side of my head I felt a violent shock like that produced by the bursting of a bomb, with another under my feet and a third more violent still on my chest. So forcible, indeed, was this last one that I thought the lid was cleft atwain. I fainted from it.

CHAPTER IV

THE NAIL

IT IS IMPOSSIBLE for me to say how long my swoon lasted. Eternity is not of longer duration than one second spent in nihility. I was no more. It was slowly and confusedly that I regained some degree of consciousness. I was still asleep, but I began to dream; a nightmare started into shape amid the blackness of my horizon, a nightmare compounded of a strange fancy which in other days had haunted my morbid imagination whenever with my propensity for dwelling upon hideous thoughts I had conjured up catastrophes.

Thus I dreamed that my wife was expecting me somewhere—at Guérande, I believe—and that I was going to join her by rail. As we passed through a tunnel a deafening roll thundered over our head, and a sudden subsidence blocked up both issues of the tunnel, leaving our train intact in the center.

We were walled up by blocks of rock in the heart of a mountain. Then a long and fearful agony commenced. No assistance could possibly reach us; even with powerful engines and incessant labor it would take a month to clear the tunnel. We were prisoners there with no outlet, and so our death was only a question of time.

My fancy had often dwelt on that hideous drama and had constantly varied the details and touches. My actors were men, women and children; their number increased to hundreds, and they were ever furnishing me with new incidents. There were some provisions in the train, but these were soon exhausted, and the hungry passengers, if they did not actually devour human flesh, at least fought furiously over the last piece of bread. Sometimes an aged man was driven back with blows and slowly perished; a mother struggled like a she-wolf to keep three or four mouthfuls for her child. In my own compartment a bride and bridegroom were dying, clasped in each other's arms in mute despair.

The line was free along the whole length of the train, and people came and went, prowling round the carriages like beasts of prey in search of carrion. All classes were mingled together. A millionaire, a high functionary, it was said, wept on a workman's shoulder. The lamps had been extinguished from the first, and the engine fire was nearly out. To pass from one carriage to another it was necessary to grope about, and thus, too, one slowly reached the engine, recognizable by its enormous barrel, its cold, motionless flanks, its useless strength, its grim silence, in the overwhelming night. Nothing could be more appalling than this train entombed alive with its passengers perishing one by one.

I gazed over the ghastliness of each detail; howls resounded through the vault; somebody whom one could not see, whose vicinity was not even suspected, would suddenly drop upon another's shoulder. But what affected me most of all was the cold and the want of air. I have never felt so chilled; a mantle of snow seemed to enwrap me; heavy moisture rained upon my skull; I was gasping; the rocky vault seemed to crush my chest; the whole mountain was seemingly weighing upon me.

Suddenly a cry of deliverance sounded. For some time past we fancied that we could hear a dull sound, and we tried to hope that men were at work and that help was coming, but it came not thus. One of the passengers, however, had discovered an air shaft in the tunnel, and, crowding round, we all saw this shaft, above which we could discern a blue patch about the size of a wafer. That blue patch filled us with rapture, for it was the sky. We stretched ourselves and stood on tiptoes to breathe more freely. Then we distinguished some black specks moving about, specks that must surely be workmen about to deliver us. A furious clamor arose. The cry "Saved! Saved!" burst from every mouth, while trembling arms were uplifted toward the tiny azure patch above.

That roar of voices aroused me. Where was I? In the tunnel, of course. I was lying at full length; hard walls were pressing against my ribs. Then I attempted to rise and struck my head roughly. Was it the rock closing in

on all sides? The blue speck had vanished—aye, the sky had disappeared—and I was still suffocating, shivering, with chattering teeth.

All at once I remembered. Intense horror raised my hair on end. I felt the hideous truth freeze me from head to foot like ice. I had shaken off the long coma which for many hours had stricken me with corpselike rigidity. Yes, I could move; my hands could feel the boards of my coffin; my lips parted; words came to me, and instinctively I called out Marguerite's name. It was a scream I raised. In that deal box my voice took so hoarse and weird a sound that it terrified me. Oh, my God, was this thing true? I was able to walk, speak, cry out that I was living, and yet my voice could not be heard; I was entombed under the earth.

I made a desperate effort to remain calm and reflect. Was there no means of getting out? Then my dream began afresh in my troubled brain. The fanciful air shaft with the blue bit of sky overhead was mingled with the real grave in which I was lying. I stared at the darkness with widely opened eyes; perhaps I might discover a hole, a slit, a glimmer of light, but only sparks of fire flitted through that night, with rays that broadened and then faded away. I was in a somber abyss again. With returning lucidity I struggled against these fatal visions. Indeed, I should need all my reason if I meant to try to save myself.

The most immediate peril lay in an increasing sense of suffocation. If I had been able to live so long without air it was owing to suspended animation, which had changed all the normal conditions of my existence, but now that my heart beat and my lungs breathed I should die, asphyxiated, if I did not promptly liberate myself. I also suffered from cold and dreaded lest I should succumb to the mortal numbness of those who fall asleep in the snow, never to wake again. Still, while unceasingly realizing the necessity of remaining calm, I felt maddening blasts sweep through my brain, and to quiet my senses I exhorted myself to patience, trying to remember the circumstances of my burial. Probably the ground had been bought for five years, and this would be against my chances of self-deliverance, for I remembered having noticed at Nantes that in the trenches of the common graves one end of the last lowered coffins protruded into the next open cavity, in which case I should only have had to break through one plank. But if I were in a separate hole, filled up above me with earth, the obstacles would prove too great. Had I not been told that the dead were buried six feet deep in Paris? How was I to get through the enormous mass of soil above me? Even if I succeeded in slitting the lid of my bier open the mold would drift in like fine sand and fill my mouth and eyes. That would be death again, a ghastly death, like drowning in mud.

However, I began to feel the planks carefully. The coffin was roomy, and I found that I was able to move my arms with tolerable ease. On both sides the roughly planed boards were stout and resistive. I slipped my arm onto my chest to raise it over my head. There I discovered in the top plank a knot in the wood which yielded slightly at my pressure. Working laboriously, I finally succeeded in driving out this knot, and on passing my finger through

the hole I found that the earth was wet and clayey. But that availed me little. I even regretted having removed the knot, vaguely dreading the irruption of the mold. A second experiment occupied me for a while. I tapped all over the coffin to ascertain if perhaps there were any vacuum outside. But the sound was everywhere the same. At last, as I was slightly kicking the foot of the coffin, I fancied that it gave out a clearer echoing noise, but that might merely be produced by the sonority of the wood.

At any rate, I began to press against the boards with my arms and my closed fists. In the same way, too, I used my knees, my back and my feet without eliciting even a creak from the wood. I strained with all my strength, indeed, with so desperate an effort of my whole frame, that my bruised bones seemed breaking. But nothing moved, and I became insane.

Until that moment I had held delirium at bay. I had mastered the intoxicating rage which was mounting to my head like the fumes of alcohol; I had silenced my screams, for I feared that if I again cried out aloud I should be undone. But now I yelled; I shouted; unearthly howls which I could not repress came from my relaxed throat. I called for help in a voice that I did not recognize, growing wilder with each fresh appeal and crying out that I would not die. I also tore at the wood with my nails; I writhed with the contortions of a caged wolf. I do not know how long this fit of madness lasted, but I can still feel the relentless hardness of the box that imprisoned me; I can still hear the storm of shrieks and sobs with which I filled it; a remaining glimmer of reason made me try to stop, but I could not do so.

Great exhaustion followed. I lay waiting for death in a state of somnolent pain. The coffin was like stone, which no effort could break, and the conviction that I was powerless left me unnerved, without courage to make any fresh attempts. Another suffering—hunger—was presently added to cold and want of air. The torture soon became intolerable. With my finger I tried to pull small pinches of earth through the hole of the dislodged knot, and I swallowed them eagerly, only increasing my torment. Tempted by my flesh, I bit my arms and sucked my skin with a fiendish desire to drive my teeth in, but I was afraid of drawing blood.

Then I ardently longed for death. All my life long I had trembled at the thought of dissolution, but I had come to yearn for it, to crave for an everlasting night that could never be dark enough. How childish it had been of me to dread the long, dreamless sleep, the eternity of silence and gloom! Death was kind, for in suppressing life it put an end to suffering. Oh, to sleep like the stones, to be no more!

With groping hands I still continued feeling the wood, and suddenly I pricked my left thumb. That slight pain roused me from my growing numbness. I felt again and found a nail—a nail which the undertaker's men had driven in crookedly and which had not caught in the lower wood. It was long and very sharp; the head was secured to the lid, but it moved. Henceforth I had but one idea—to possess myself of that nail—and I slipped my right hand across my body and began to shake it. I made but little progress, however; it was a difficult job, for my hands soon tired, and I had to use them alternately.

The left one, too, was of little use on account of the nail's awkward position.

While I was obstinately persevering a plan dawned on my mind. That nail meant salvation, and I must have it. But should I get it in time? Hunger was torturing me; my brain was swimming; my limbs were losing their strength; my mind was becoming confused. I had sucked the drops that trickled from my punctured finger, and suddenly I bit my arm and drank my own blood! Thereupon, spurred on by pain, revived by the tepid, acrid liquor that moistened my lips, I tore desperately at the nail and at last I wrenched it off!

I then believed in success. My plan was a simple one; I pushed the point of the nail into the lid, dragging it along as far as I could in a straight line and working it so as to make a slit in the wood. My fingers stiffened, but I doggedly persevered, and when I fancied that I had sufficiently cut into the board I turned on my stomach and, lifting myself on my knees and elbows, thrust the whole strength of my back against the lid. But although it creaked it did not yield; the notched line was not deep enough. I had to resume my old position—which I only managed to do with infinite trouble—and work afresh. At last after another supreme effort the lid was cleft from end to end.

I was not saved as yet, but my heart beat with renewed hope. I had ceased pushing and remained motionless, lest a sudden fall of earth should bury me. I intended to use the lid as a screen and, thus protected, to open a sort of shaft in the clayey soil. Unfortunately I was assailed by unexpected difficulties. Some heavy clods of earth weighed upon the boards and made them unmanageable; I foresaw that I should never reach the surface in that way, for the mass of soil was already bending my spine and crushing my face.

Once more I stopped, affrighted; then suddenly, while I was stretching my legs, trying to find something firm against which I might rest my feet, I felt the end board of the coffin yielding. I at once gave a desperate kick with my heels in the faint hope that there might be a freshly dug grave in that direction.

It was so. My feet abruptly forced their way into space. An open grave was there; I had only a slight partition of earth to displace, and soon I rolled into the cavity. I was saved!

I remained for a time lying on my back in the open grave, with my eyes raised to heaven. It was dark; the stars were shining in a sky of velvety blueness. Now and then the rising breeze wafted a springlike freshness, a perfume of foliage, upon me. I was saved! I could breathe; I felt warm, and I wept and I stammered, with my arms prayerfully extended toward the starry sky. O God, how sweet seemed life!

CHAPTER V

MY RESURRECTION

MY FIRST IMPULSE was to find the custodian of the cemetery and ask him to have me conducted home, but various thoughts that came to me restrained me from following that course. My return would create general alarm; why

should I hurry now that I was master of the situation? I felt my limbs; I had only an insignificant wound on my left arm, where I had bitten myself, and a slight feverishness lent me unhopèd-for strength. I should no doubt be able to walk unaided.

Still I lingered; all sorts of dim visions confused my mind. I had felt beside me in the open grave some sextons' tools which had been left there, and I conceived a sudden desire to repair the damage I had done, to close up the hole through which I had crept, so as to conceal all traces of my resurrection. I do not believe that I had any positive motive in doing so. I only deemed it useless to proclaim my adventure aloud, feeling ashamed to find myself alive when the whole world thought me dead. In half an hour every trace of my escape was obliterated, and then I climbed out of the hole.

The night was splendid, and deep silence reigned in the cemetery; the black trees threw motionless shadows over the white tombs. When I endeavored to ascertain my bearings I noticed that one half of the sky was ruddy, as if lit by a huge conflagration; Paris lay in that direction, and I moved toward it, following a long avenue amid the darkness of the branches.

However, after I had gone some fifty yards I was compelled to stop, feeling faint and weary. I then sat down on a stone bench and for the first time looked at myself. I was fully attired with the exception that I had no hat. I blessed my beloved Marguerite for the pious thought which had prompted her to dress me in my best clothes—those which I had worn at our wedding. That remembrance of my wife brought me to my feet again. I longed to see her without delay.

At the farther end of the avenue I had taken a wall arrested my progress. However, I climbed to the top of a monument, reached the summit of the wall and then dropped over the other side. Although roughly shaken by the fall, I managed to walk for a few minutes along a broad deserted street skirting the cemetery. I had no notion as to where I might be, but with the reiteration of monomania I kept saying to myself that I was going toward Paris and that I should find the Rue Dauphine somehow or other. Several people passed me but, seized with sudden distrust, I would not stop them and ask my way. I have since realized that I was then in a burning fever and already nearly delirious. Finally, just as I reached a large thoroughfare, I became giddy and fell heavily upon the pavement.

Here there is a blank in my life. For three whole weeks I remained unconscious. When I awoke at last I found myself in a strange room. A man who was nursing me told me quietly that he had picked me up one morning on the Boulevard Montparnasse and had brought me to his house. He was an old doctor who had given up practicing.

When I attempted to thank him he sharply answered that my case had seemed a curious one and that he had wished to study it. Moreover, during the first days of my convalescence he would not allow me to ask a single question, and later on he never put one to me. For eight days longer I remained in bed, feeling very weak and not even trying to remember, for memory was a weariness and a pain. I felt half ashamed and half afraid. As

soon as I could leave the house I would go and find out whatever I wanted to know. Possibly in the delirium of fever a name had escaped me; however, the doctor never alluded to anything I may have said. His charity was not only generous; it was discreet.

The summer had come at last, and one warm June morning I was permitted to take a short walk. The sun was shining with that joyous brightness which imparts renewed youth to the streets of old Paris. I went along slowly, questioning the passers-by at every crossing I came to and asking the way to Rue Dauphine. When I reached the street I had some difficulty in recognizing the lodginghouse where we had alighted on our arrival in the capital. A childish terror made me hesitate. If I appeared suddenly before Marguerite the shock might kill her. It might be wiser to begin by revealing myself to our neighbor Mme Gabin; still I shrank from taking a third party into confidence. I seemed unable to arrive at a resolution, and yet in my innermost heart I felt a great void, like that left by some sacrifice long since consummated.

The building looked quite yellow in the sunshine. I had just recognized it by a shabby eating house on the ground floor, where we had ordered our meals, having them sent up to us. Then I raised my eyes to the last window of the third floor on the left-hand side, and as I looked at it a young woman with tumbled hair, wearing a loose dressing gown, appeared and leaned her elbows on the sill. A young man followed and printed a kiss upon her neck. It was not Marguerite. Still I felt no surprise. It seemed to me that I had dreamed all this with other things, too, which I was to learn presently.

For a moment I remained in the street, uncertain whether I had better go upstairs and question the lovers, who were still laughing in the sunshine. However, I decided to enter the little restaurant below. When I started on my walk the old doctor had placed a five-franc piece in my hand. No doubt I was changed beyond recognition, for my beard had grown during the brain fever, and my face was wrinkled and haggard. As I took a seat at a small table I saw Mme Gabin come in carrying a cup; she wished to buy a penny-worth of coffee. Standing in front of the counter, she began to gossip with the landlady of the establishment.

"Well," asked the latter, "so the poor little woman of the third floor has made up her mind at last, eh?"

"How could she help herself?" answered Mme Gabin. "It was the very best thing for her to do. Monsieur Simoneau showed her so much kindness. You see, he had finished his business in Paris to his satisfaction, for he has inherited a pot of money. Well, he offered to take her away with him to his own part of the country and place her with an aunt of his, who wants a housekeeper and companion."

The landlady laughed archly. I buried my face in a newspaper which I picked off the table. My lips were white and my hands shook.

"It will end in a marriage, of course," resumed Mme Gabin. "The little widow mourned for her husband very properly, and the young man was extremely well behaved. Well, they left last night—and, after all, they were free to please themselves."

Just then the side door of the restaurant, communicating with the passage of the house, opened, and Dédé appeared.

"Mother, ain't you coming?" she cried. "I'm waiting, you know; do be quick."

"Presently," said the mother testily. "Don't bother."

The girl stood listening to the two women with the precocious shrewdness of a child born and reared amid the streets of Paris.

"When all is said and done," explained Mme Gabin, "the dear departed did not come up to Monsieur Simoneau. I didn't fancy him overmuch; he was a puny sort of a man, a poor, fretful fellow, and he hadn't a penny to bless himself with. No, candidly, he wasn't the kind of husband for a young and healthy wife, whereas Monsieur Simoneau is rich, you know, and as strong as a Turk."

"Oh yes!" interrupted Dédé. "I saw him once when he was washing—his door was open. His arms are so hairy!"

"Get along with you," screamed the old woman, shoving the girl out of the restaurant. "You are always poking your nose where it has no business to be."

Then she concluded with these words: "Look here, to my mind the other one did quite right to take himself off. It was fine luck for the little woman!"

When I found myself in the street again I walked along slowly with trembling limbs. And yet I was not suffering much; I think I smiled once at my shadow in the sun. It was quite true. I *was* very puny. It had been a queer notion of mine to marry Marguerite. I recalled her weariness at Guérande, her impatience, her dull, monotonous life. The dear creature had been very good to me, but I had never been a real lover; she had mourned for me as a sister for her brother, not otherwise. Why should I again disturb her life? A dead man is not jealous.

When I lifted my eyelids I saw the garden of the Luxembourg before me. I entered it and took a seat in the sun, dreaming with a sense of infinite restfulness. The thought of Marguerite stirred me softly. I pictured her in the provinces, beloved, petted and very happy. She had grown handsomer, and she was the mother of three boys and two girls. It was all right. I had behaved like an honest man in dying, and I would not commit the cruel folly of coming to life again.

Since then I have traveled a good deal. I have been a little everywhere. I am an ordinary man who has toiled and eaten like anybody else. Death no longer frightens me, but it does not seem to care for me now that I have no motive in living, and I sometimes fear that I have been forgotten upon earth.

THE INUNDATION

CHAPTER I

GLORIOUS DAYS

MY NAME is Louis Roubieu. I am seventy years of age and was born in the village of Saint-Jory, at a few leagues from Toulouse, on the banks of the Garonne. During fourteen years I battled with the soil in order to obtain from it enough bread to feed me. Affluence came at last, and only a month ago I was the richest farmer of the whole countryside.

Our home was blessed. Happiness had its abode under our roof. The sun was our ally, and I do not remember a bad harvest. We were nearly a dozen at the farm, all sharing the same happiness: myself, still hale and hearty, teaching the young ones how to work; my younger brother Pierre, a bachelor and formerly a sergeant in the army; my sister Agathe, a shrewd housewife, extremely stout and gay, who had come to live with us after her husband's death and whose laughter rang out from one end of the village to the other. Next came the whole brood: my son Jacques and Rose, his wife, with their three daughters, Aimée, Véronique and Marie. The first was married to Cyprien Bouisson, a strapping young fellow, to whom she had given two babies, one two years old and the other ten months old; Véronique, on her side, had just become engaged to Gaspard Rabuteau, while Marie, white and very fair, looked more like a town-born lady than a farmer's daughter. This made up ten; I was both a grandfather and a great-grandfather.

When we assembled round the supper table I used to place my sister Agathe on my right, my brother Pierre on my left, and the children completed the circle, seated by order of seniority, down to the mite but ten months old. The whole lot ate heartily, and how gay they all were between each mouthful! I felt both pride and pleasure glowing in my veins when the little ones, stretching out their hands to me, shouted:

"Grandfather, give us some more bread. A big piece, Grandfather, please!"

Those were glorious days. The busy house sang through all its windows; in the evenings Pierre invented new games or told old stories of his regiment; on Sundays Aunt Agathe baked cakes for the girls, and Marie knew some beautiful hymns which she sang with the voice of a young chorister, looking like a saint, too, with her fair hair falling low on her neck and her hands folded in her lap. At the time of Aimée's marriage with Cyprien I had added a story to the house, and I used to say jokingly that when Véronique married Gaspard I should have to add another, and that if I did so at each successive wedding the house would end by reaching the sky. None of us wanted to leave it; we would rather have erected a town in the enclosure behind the farm. When the members of a large family agree it is good to live and die on the spot where one was born.

This last spring the month of May was superb; the crops had not looked so promising for years. That day I went the round of the land with my son Jacques. We started at about three o'clock. Our meadows, still of a tender

green, stretched alongside the Garonne; the grass had nearly reached its full height, and in a willow copse planted only last year there were shoots a yard long. We passed on, examining our cornfields and vineyards, the land bought bit by bit as our means increased. The wheat was growing apace; the vines were in full bloom, heralding a rich vintage. Jacques laughed his hearty laugh and, slapping me on the shoulder, said: "Well, Father, we shan't lack bread or wine. You must be in the good graces of God Almighty, as He lets money rain upon your land like this."

Jacques was right. I had no doubt gained the good graces of some saint in heaven, for all the good luck of the district appeared to fall on us. During a storm the hail would stop at the edge of our fields; if our neighbors' vines were ailing a protecting wall seemed to rise around ours, and gradually I had come to deem this just. Harming no one, I believed happiness to be my due.

On our way home we crossed some land belonging to us on the opposite side of the village. A plantation of mulberry trees was coming on splendidly, and the almond trees in a grove were bearing all they could. We chatted gaily and made plans for the future. As soon as we had saved the necessary capital we would purchase certain patches of ground lying between our various lots and thus become the owners of an entire corner of the parish. If the crops turned out as well as they promised our dream could be realized in the autumn.

As we drew near the farm we saw Rose gesticulating and shouting: "Come on, hurry up!"

One of our cows had just calved, and the whole household was astir. Aunt Agathe went rolling about, while the girls watched the little calf, whose advent seemed like an additional benison. Quite recently we had been compelled to enlarge our sheds, which contained nearly a hundred head of cattle without reckoning the horses.

"Another lucky day," I said. "We must have a bottle of good wine tonight."

Just then Rose took us aside to inform us that as Gaspard, Véronique's lover, had come to fix the wedding day, she had kept him to dinner. Gaspard, the eldest son of a farmer of Moranges, was a young man of twenty, known all through our part for his prodigious strength. At a public fete at Toulouse he had wrestled with and defeated Martial, the Lion of the South. Withal he was extremely good-natured and tenderhearted and so shy, indeed, that he blushed whenever Véronique's calm eyes met his own.

I told Rose to call him. He had stayed in the yard, helping the maids to hang out the linen of a three months' washing. When he entered the parlor, where we were all assembled, Jacques turned to me, saying, "It's for you to speak, Father."

"Well, my boy, you have come to settle the day," I said.

"Yes, that's why I came," he answered with a deep color on his cheeks.

"Don't blush, my lad," I resumed. "Shall we say the tenth of July, the day of Sainte Félicité? Today's the twenty-eighth of June, so you won't have

long to wait. My poor dead wife's name was *Félicité*—it will be a good omen. Well, is it a settled thing?"

"Yes, all right; the day of *Sainte Félicité* will do," replied Gaspard.

Then as he came up to Jacques and me his hand fell on our outstretched palms with a might sufficient to fell an ox. Next he kissed Rose, calling her "mother." This stalwart young fellow with such redoubtable fists was losing sleep and flesh for love of *Véronique*; he told us that he should have fallen ill if we had not consented to let him have her.

"Now," I resumed, "let us go to our meal. All of you to your places. Thunder and lightning! I am as hungry as a wolf!"

That evening we sat down eleven. We had placed Gaspard and *Véronique* side by side, and he kept gazing at her, forgetting his supper and so disturbed by the thought that she was his that big tears moistened his eyelashes. *Cyprien* and *Aimée*, who had been married three years, smiled as they watched them; Jacques and Rose, with their twenty-five years of wedlock, were graver, still they stealthily exchanged moist glances, born of long-abiding tenderness. As for myself, I felt as if I were growing young again and living anew in those lovers, whose happiness seemed to bring a nook of paradise to our board. How excellent the soup tasted that evening! Aunt *Agathe*, who was always one for laughing, ventured to make a few jocose remarks, whereupon *Pierre* insisted upon relating his love passages with a lady of Lyons. Fortunately we had got to the dessert and were all talking at the same time. I had brought two bottles of sweet wine from the cellar, and we drank to Gaspard and *Véronique*'s good luck, as the fashion is with us. Luck is never to quarrel, to have heaps of children and put by bags of money. Later on we had some singing; Gaspard knew some love ballads in our dialect, and by way of conclusion we asked Marie for a hymn. She stood up and began at once, her flutelike and delicate voice falling like a caress on the ear.

I had moved toward the window, and as Gaspard joined me I said, "There is nothing new over your way, is there?"

"No," he answered; "they talk a good deal about the heavy rains of the last few days; some say they might turn out badly."

It had, indeed, recently been raining during sixty consecutive hours, and since the previous day the Garonne had been greatly swollen; still we trusted her, and as long as she did not overflow we could not think of her as a dangerous neighbor. She was so useful; her expanse of water was so broad and gentle, and, moreover, peasants do not readily quit their homes even if the roof be about to fall.

"Nonsense," I said; "nothing will happen; it's the same every year. The river puts up its back as if it were in a rage, then it quiets down in a single night and subsides as gently as a lamb. Take my word, lad, it's only a joke. Just look out of the window and see what splendid weather we are having!"

Then with my hand I pointed to the sky.

It was seven o'clock; the sun was setting. All was blue; the sky showed like an immense expanse of azure, through which the sunset swam like golden dust. From above there slowly descended a delight, reaching to the

verge of the distant horizon. I had never seen the village in such tender restfulness. A pink glow was fading under the eaves. I could hear a neighbor laughing and children chattering at the bend of the road opposite our house, while from farther off the lowing of herds returning to their sheds reached us, softened by the distance.

Meanwhile the deep roar of the Garonne sounded incessantly, but I was so used to the voice of the river that it seemed to be merely the voice of silence. By degrees the sky whitened and the village seemed falling into a serener sleep. It was the end of a beautiful day, and I fancied that all our happiness, our rich harvests, Véronique's engagement, came to us wafted from above, in the purity of the dying light. A benediction spread over us with the farewell of day.

I had returned to the center of the room where the girls were chatting merrily, and we were listening to them with smiling lips when suddenly, through the great peace of the twilight, an appalling shriek rang out—a shriek of terror and of death:

"The Garonne! The Garonne!"

CHAPTER II

THE GARONNE!

WE RAN to the yard.

Saint-Jory lies at the very bottom of a dip in the land, lower than the river and some five hundred yards away from it. A screen of poplars dividing some meadows shuts out all view of the water.

We could see nothing, but the shriek still resounded: "The Garonne! The Garonne!"

Then coming from the road in front of us, two men and three women abruptly appeared, one of the latter holding a child in her arms. They were shouting, frenzied with terror, and running as fast as they could over the hard ground. Every now and then they looked back with scared faces, as if they were being pursued by a pack of wolves.

"What has happened?" cried Cyprien. "Can you make out anything, Grandfather?"

"No," I answered; "the leaves are not even stirring."

The low line of the horizon lay still and peaceful, but before I had done speaking a sharp exclamation broke from the others. Behind the fugitives, between the trunks of the poplars, over the tall grass, we caught sight of something resembling a pack of gray, yellowish spotted animals racing onward. They appeared on all sides—waves hurrying upon waves, an invasion of masses of water crested with foam, shaking white saliva, and making the ground quiver with the heavy gallop of their scurried ranks.

Then we also echoed the despairing cry, "The Garonne! The Garonne!"

The two men and the three women were still flying along the road, and they could hear the hideous gallop gaining upon them. Presently the waves

formed in a single line, rolling and crashing with the thunder of charging battalions. Under their first onset three poplars snapped; their tall foliage tottered and disappeared. Then a shed was swollen up; a wall burst; unharnessed carts were carried away like wisps of straw. But the water seemed specially to pursue the fugitives. At a bend of the road, which is very steep at that particular spot, the flood suddenly fell in immense volume, cutting off their retreat. We saw them still attempting to run, splashing in the water, but silent now and maddened with fear. The waves rose to their knees; at last a huge billow dashed upon the woman who was carrying the child. Then all were submerged.

"Quick, quick!" I cried. "Come in! The house is strong. We have nothing to fear."

However, out of prudence we at once ascended to the first floor, making the girls pass before us; I was determined to be the last. Our house was built on a bank above the road, and the water was now slowly invading the yard with a soft little ripple. We were not much alarmed.

"Never mind," said Jacques reassuringly; "there is no danger. Do you remember, Father, how in '55 the water came into the yard just as it does now? It rose to a foot and then receded."

"It's a pity for the crops, anyhow," muttered Cyprien, half aloud.

"No, no; it won't be much," I said, noting the dilated, questioning eyes of the women. Aimée had laid her children on her bed and sat close to them with Véronique and Marie. Aunt Agathe talked of warming some wine which she had brought with her in order to cheer us. Jacques and Rose looked out of the window, and I stood at the other with my brother, Cyprien and Gaspard.

"Come up, can't you?" I called to the two maids who were paddling about in the yard. "Don't stop there and get your legs wet."

"But the poor beasts," they answered; "they are frightened and will get killed in the sheds."

"Never mind! Come up. We will look after the cattle presently."

If the water continued to rise it would be impossible to save the cattle, but I thought it best not to alarm the servants. I tried to appear quite at ease and, leaning over the window sill, I gave an account of the progress of the flood. After rushing to the assault of the village the river had taken possession of even its narrowest lanes. The race of the charging waves had ceased; there was now a stealthy, invincible invasion. The hollow in which Saint-Jory lies was being transformed into a lake. In our yard the water had risen to a height of three feet already: I watched its ascent, but I affirmed that it remained stationary, and once I even hinted that it was subsiding.

"You will have to sleep here tonight, my boy," I said, turning to Gaspard; "that is, unless the roads get clear in a few hours, which might easily be the case."

He looked at me; his face was very pale, and I saw his eyes turn to Véronique, gleaming the while with intolerable anguish.

It was half-past eight. Out of doors it was still light—a white glimmer,

unspeakably mournful, dropping from the pale sky. Before the maids joined us they had thought of bringing two lamps. I had them lit, hoping that they would brighten the darkening room in which we had taken refuge. Aunt Agathe now pushed a table forward and suggested a game of cards. The excellent woman, whose eyes sought mine anxiously every now and then, was especially desirous of diverting the children: her cheerfulness was grandly brave, and she laughed to conjure away the terror which she felt was creeping over all the others. The game was arranged; Aunt Agathe forced Aimée, Véronique and Marie into their chairs, placed the cards in their resistless fingers and began shuffling, dealing and cutting with such a flow of words that she almost stifled the sound of the rising flood. But our daughters could not fix their minds on the game; they remained pale, with feverish hands, bending their heads to listen. Every now and then one or another of them would turn uneasily and whisper:

"Grandfather, is it still rising?"

It *was* rising with fearful rapidity, but I answered carelessly, "No, no; go on playing—there is no danger."

Never before had I felt my heart wrung by such cruel dread. All the men had grouped themselves in front of the windows to shut out the appalling scene; we tried to look unconcerned when our faces were turned to the room, facing the lamps whose circular light fell on the table as amid the gentle peace of homely vigils. I remembered winter evenings when we had sat thus at the table. It was the same quiet picture, full of the soft warmth of affection. But while perfect peace dwelt within, I could hear behind my back the bellowing of the overflowing river, which was ever rising and rushing onward.

"Louis," whispered my brother Pierre, "the water is only three feet from the window; something must be done."

I pressed his arm to silence him, but it was too late to conceal our peril. The cattle had become frantic in the outhouses: we plainly heard the bleating and lowing of the maddened animals and particularly the wild shrieks of the horses who felt themselves in danger.

"Oh my God! My God!" murmured Aimée, who stood up, convulsed by a long shudder and with her closed fists pressed to her temples.

The women had all risen, and we were powerless to keep them from the windows; they stood there erect and mute, their hair lifted by a wind of terror. The twilight had come; a treacherous gleam hovered above the watery sheet; the pale sky looked like a white pall thrown over the earth; afar off some smoke was trailing; then everything became blurred: it was the close of a day of horror, sinking into a night of death. And not a human sound—only the dull roar of the infinitely widening expanse of water and the lowing and neighing of the frenzied animals!

"Oh God! Oh God!" repeated the women under their breath, as if afraid to speak aloud.

A loud crash silenced them. The infuriated cattle had broken through the stable doors; they passed by in the yellow flood, rolling as they were carried

away by the current; the sheep were hurled along in droves like dead leaves whirling in pools; the cows and the horses struggled, trying to feel the ground but losing their footing; our big gray horse refused to die: he reared, stretched out his long neck and panted like the bellows of a forge till the eager waters dashed on his hindquarters, and then we saw him yield himself up and disappear.

Then for the first time we screamed; our cries seemed to come unconsciously, propelled by some alien will. With hands outstretched toward all those dear animals hurried away forever, we moaned and wept, sobbing aloud, giving vent to the tears and lamentations we had restrained. It was indeed our ruin! The crops lost, the cattle drowned, our fortune gone in a few brief hours! Oh, God was not just! We had not offended Him, and yet He had taken back all He had given! I shook my fist at heaven! I recalled our afternoon walk, the meadows, the wheat fields, the vineyards, all so promising! They had all lied! Happiness had lied! The very sun, when he had set so gently and calmly in the deep serenity of evening, had lied.

The flood was still rising, and all at once my brother Pierre, who had been watching it, exclaimed sharply: "Louis, look out! The water has reached the windows. We can't stay here."

These words broke upon our despair. I pulled myself together and, shrugging my shoulders, said, "After all, money is nothing. As long as we are all together and safe there is nothing to regret. We must begin work afresh; that is all."

"Yes, yes—you are right, Father," returned Jacques feverishly, "and we *are* safe—the walls are solid. Let us get upon the roof."

It was our only refuge. The water, after mounting the staircase step by step with a persevering gurgle, was entering at the door. We repaired to the loft, keeping close together, with the vague instinct which makes people in peril anxious to remain side by side. Cyprien alone had vanished. I called to him, and he came out of an adjoining room with a white, scared face. Then as I suddenly became aware of the absence of the two maids and stopped to wait for them, he looked at me strangely and whispered:

"Dead—the outbuilding where their room was has just given way."

The poor creatures must have gone to get their savings out of their boxes. Cyprien, in the same tone, told me that they had managed to throw a ladder across to the building where they slept and had used it as a bridge. I warned him to say nothing, but I felt a great chill at the back of my neck. It was the breath of death entering our house.

We did not even think of turning out the lamps when we went up to the roof in our turn; the cards remained spread out on the table; there was a foot of water in the room.

CHAPTER III

A CRISIS

FORTUNATELY the roof was broad and the incline a gentle one. It was reached by a skylight opening on to a little platform, upon which our party took refuge. The women sat down, and presently the men stepped out on the tiles to reconnoiter, going as far as the two tall chimney stacks at either end of the roof. I remained leaning against the aperture of the skylight, looking toward the four points of the horizon.

"Help cannot fail to come soon," I said with forced hopefulness. "The folks of Saintin have some boats, and they will pass this way. See over there, isn't that a lantern on the water?"

I received no answer. Pierre had mechanically lighted his pipe and was smoking so furiously that with every puff he spat out bits of the stem which he had broken between his teeth. Jacques and Cyprien stared into the distance with mournful faces, while Gaspard, with clenched fists, went on pacing the roof as if seeking for some outlet. The women, crouching and shuddering at our feet, covered their eyes to avoid the terrible sight. Presently, however, Rose, raising her head, looked round her.

"Where are the servants?" she asked. "Why don't they come up?"

I pretended not to hear, but she turned to me and fixed her eyes on mine.

"Where are the girls?" she repeated.

I turned away. I could not lie to her, and I felt that the deadly chill which had already touched me was passing over our wives and daughters. They had understood. Marie rose to her full height; a deep sigh parted her lips, and then, sinking down, she burst into a passion of tears. Aimée kept the heads of her two children in her lap, covering them up with her skirts as if to shield them. Véronique, who had her face in her hands, remained motionless. Aunt Agathe, growing paler, was repeatedly making the sign of the cross and muttering Paters and Aves.

All around us the scene was one of supreme grandeur. The night, which had now completely fallen, had the clear limpidity of summer darkness. There was no moon as yet, but the sky was studded with countless stars, and it was of so pure a blue that all the surrounding space was filled with an azure light. The horizon was so clearly defined that it seemed to harbor the twilight, and meanwhile the immense sheet of water, spreading out under the soft skies, became quite white, luminous as with a glow of its own, a phosphorescence which tipped the crest of every wave with tiny flamelets. Land was nowhere visible; the whole plain must have been submerged. One evening on the coast near Marseilles I had seen the sea looking like this and had remained gazing at it, transfixed with admiration.

"The water rises; the water rises," repeated my brother Pierre, still biting the stem of his pipe, which he had allowed to go out.

Indeed, the water was now only a yard from the edge of the roof. It

was losing its tranquillity, its lakelike quietude, and currents were forming. When it reached a certain height we were no longer sheltered by the rising ground before the village, and as soon as this was covered, in less than an hour's time, the flood became threatening, lashing the houses with all the wreckage, staved-in barrels, timbers and trusses of hay, which it carried on its bosom. In the distance we heard the deafening shocks of the onsets against the walls. Poplars snapped and fell with a sinister splash, and houses crashed down like cartfuls of stones turned over on the roadside.

Jacques, unnerved by the women's sobs, kept on repeating: "We cannot stop here. Something must be done. Father, I implore you, let us try something."

Hesitating and stammering, I repeated after him: "Yes, yes, let us try something."

And none of us knew what to try. Gaspard proposed that he should take Véronique on his back and swim away with her. Pierre suggested a raft. They were both crazy. At last, however, Cyprien said: "If we could only reach the church."

And, indeed, high above the flood the church still rose up intact with its little square tower. We were separated from it by seven dwellings. Our house, the first of the village, adjoined a taller building, which in its turn leaned against its neighbor. It might be feasible to reach the presbytery by the roofs, and thence it would be easy to get into the church. Many of the villagers had already sought that refuge probably, for the neighboring roofs were deserted, and we heard a murmur of voices which certainly came from the belfry. But at best it was a perilous and uncertain undertaking.

"It is impossible," said Pierre. "Rambeau's house is too lofty; we should need some ladders."

"At any rate, I'll go and see," said Cyprien. "If we cannot get across I'll return; if we can we must all go, the men carrying the women."

I let him start. He was right: situated as we were, everything must be attempted. With the help of an iron clamp fixed to a chimney stack he had just succeeded in climbing onto the next house when his wife Aimée raised her eyes and saw that he was gone.

"Where is he?" she said. "I will not let him leave me. We are one—we must die together."

Then as she caught sight of him on the other roof she darted across the tiles, still carrying her children.

"Wait for me, Cyprien," she panted; "I am coming with you. I will die with you."

She would not be denied. Her husband, leaning over, implored her to remain with us, promising to return and assuring her that he was only acting for our common rescue. But shaking her head and with a wild look in her eyes, she still repeated excitedly: "I am coming with you. I will die with you."

He yielded; first he took the children, and then he helped his wife to climb up to him. We could see them walking slowly on the apex of the roof.

Aimée had again taken her weeping children in her arms, and at every step Cyprien turned and supported her.

"As soon as she is in safety," I shouted, "come back to us."

I saw him wave his hand, but the roar of the water did not allow me to hear his answer. They were soon out of sight; they had descended onto the house beyond, the roof of which was lower. Five minutes later they again appeared on the third roof, which must have been very steep, for we could see that they were crawling up it on their knees. A sudden dread possessed me and, raising my hands to my mouth, I shouted out with all my strength: "Come back, come back!"

All of us, Pierre, Jacques and Gaspard, called to them to return; our voices seemed to stay them for a moment, but they soon moved on. They had reached the corner where the street turned in front of Rambeau's house, a tall building rising nearly nine feet above all the neighboring roofs. For a moment they wavered, and then Cyprien began to climb up a chimney with catlike agility. Aimée, who had evidently consented to wait for him, remained erect amid the tiles. We could plainly distinguish her clasping her babies to her bosom, standing out black against the clear sky and looking much taller than she really was. It was then that the awful catastrophe began.

Rambeau's house, originally intended for some business purposes, was very flimsily built, and, moreover, its frontage received the full shock of the current in the street. I fancied I could see it tremble under the onset of flood, and with bated breath I watched Cyprien's progress along the roof. Suddenly we heard a deep growl. The round moon had risen, freely pacing the sky, her yellow disk lighting up the immense lake with the clear brightness of a lamp. Not a single detail was lost to us. That growl was the noise of Rambeau's house falling in. A scream of terror escaped us as we saw Cyprien sink down. In that tempestuous crash we could only see the splashing of the waves under the remnants of the roof. Then all was calm again; the lake became level once more, with the black carcass of the submerged house bristling above the water with its snapped floors—a confused mass of tangled timbers, looking like the framework of some half-destroyed cathedral. Between those timbers I thought I could see a body moving, a living form wrestling with superhuman efforts.

"He lives!" I cried. "Ah, blessed be God, he lives! There, above that white sheet of water lit up by the moon!"

We shook with hysterical laughter and clapped our hands for joy, as if all danger had passed away.

"He will get up again," said Pierre.

"Yes, yes," explained Gaspard. "See? He is trying to catch hold of the beam on his left."

But our laughter was suddenly hushed. We remained dumb, silenced by anxiety. We had just realized in what an awful position Cyprien had now found himself. In the fall of the house his feet had been caught between two beams, and he was hanging head downward at a few inches above the water and quite unable to free himself. His agony was horrible. On the

roof of the other house stood Aimée with her two children, shaken by convulsive shudders. There she remained, a witness of her husband's death struggle, never once taking her eyes off him. From her rigid lips there came a continuous lugubrious sound, like the howl of a dog frenzied by terror.

"We cannot let him die like that," said Jacques in distraction. "We must go to him."

"One might crawl down the beams, perhaps," muttered Pierre, "and disengage him."

They were already moving toward the nearest roof when the house it covered suddenly shook and crumbled in its turn. The way was cut off. Our blood froze in our veins. We seized each other's hands and pressed them nervously, unable to turn our eyes away from the ghastly sight.

Cyprien had at first attempted to stiffen himself, and with extraordinary muscular strength he had finally succeeded in getting farther away from the water and maintaining a sidelong position. But fatigue was mastering him; he tried to resist, to lay hold of the beams, beating the air with his arms in the hope of finding something to which he might cling; then, accepting death, he fell back and again hung down quite motionless. Death was slow to come; his hair barely touched the water, which was patiently rising—he must have felt its coolness on his head. A first wave wet his brow; another closed his eyes—slowly his head vanished from our view.

The women, huddled at our feet, hid their faces with their clasped hands. We fell on our knees with outstretched arms, stammering supplications and crying bitterly. On the other roof Aimée, still erect, with her children close pressed to her bosom, shrieked still louder and louder amid the night.

CHAPTER IV

THE BATTLE

I CANNOT TELL how long the stupor of that crisis lasted. When I recovered my senses the water was higher still; it now reached the tiles, and our roof was only a narrow island, barely emerging from the immense watery expanse. On the right and left the houses had fallen. The sea was widening on all sides.

"We are moving," whispered Rose as she clutched at the tiles.

And, indeed, we all felt a pitching motion, as if the roof had changed into a floating raft; the heavy swell seemed to carry us along. It was only by turning to the motionless church tower that we got rid of this delusion and realized that we were on the same spot amid the angry surf.

It was then that the siege began in earnest. The current so far had followed the street, but the increasing wreckage that barred the way now caused it to flow back. A furious onset commenced. As soon as a plank or beam passed within the current's grasp it was seized, swung round and hurled like a ram against our house; the water never loosened its grasp; the current sucked the wreckage back merely to launch it again at our walls, which it

assailed with regular repeated blows. Sometimes ten or twelve large pieces of wood would attack us at once on all sides. The water hissed; foamy splashes wet our feet. We heard the dull moan of the sonorous house filling with water and the creaking of the broken partitions, and whenever a more savage assault made the whole building quiver, we fancied that it was all over—that the walls were opening and giving us up to the river through their yawning breaches.

Gaspard, who had ventured to the very edge of the roof, succeeded in catching a passing beam, which he dragged out of the water with his powerful athletic arms.

"We must defend ourselves," he shouted.

Then Jacques, with the assistance of Pierre, endeavored to stop a long pole. I cursed my old age, which left me useless and as weak as a child. However, the defense was being organized; it was the fight of three men against the flood. Gaspard, armed with his beam, waited for the passing timbers, which the current turned into battering-rams, and kept them off at some little distance from the walls. The shock at times was so great that he fell down. Meantime Pierre and Jacques were maneuvering with their long pole, shoving away the nearer wreckage.

This fierce and senseless battle lasted during nearly an hour. As the time passed the combatants grew wildly excited; they beat the water, insulted it and swore at it. Gaspard hacked at it as if in a bodily struggle, lunged out with his beam as if he were trying to pierce a human breast. And all this time the water remained quietly obstinate, without a wound—invincible. Jacques and Pierre at last sank down on the roof, exhausted, and Gaspard, while making a final effort, saw the current wrest his beam from his grasp and hurl it against us. The struggle had become impossible.

Marie and Véronique, clasped in each other's arms, were repeating the same words in broken tones—words of terror, the echo of which still sounds incessantly in my ears: "I will not die! I will not die!"

Rose embraced them both, trying to reassure and comfort them, but at last she herself, trembling and shivering, lifted her white face and unconsciously cried aloud, "I will not die!"

Aunt Agathe alone remained quite silent. She had ceased praying and crossing herself. In a sort of dazed stupor she now let her eyes wander over the scene, and whenever they chanced to meet mine she still attempted a smile.

The water was lapping the tiles. No help could reach us now. We still heard the sound of voices issuing from the church; two lanterns had gleamed for an instant in the distance, then again the silence deepened amid the desolate immensity of the yellow expanse. In all probability the people of Saintin who owned some boats had been surprised by the flood before us.

Gaspard was still wandering about the roof, and suddenly he called to us, saying: "Look out! Help me—hold me tight!"

He had again snatched hold of a passing timber and was lying in wait for a huge black mass which was slowly swimming toward us. It was the broad, solid plank roof of a shed, wrenched away entire and floating like a raft.

When it came within reach Gaspard arrested it, and, feeling that he was being dragged off, he called to us to help him. We seized him round the waist and clasped him tight. As soon as the wreck entered the current it advanced of its own accord against our roof, coming forward with so much violence that for a moment we feared we should see it fly asunder.

However, Gaspard boldly jumped upon this raft thus sent to us by Providence; he walked all over it to make sure of its strength, while Jacques and Pierre maintained it in position at the edge of our roof. Then he began to laugh and said exultingly, "You see, Grandfather, we are saved. Come, you women, leave off crying! It is as good as a real boat. Look here, my feet are dry. It can carry us all too. It feels like home already."

However, he thought it better to strengthen it and, securing some more beams, he bound them with some ropes which Pierre had happened to bring up with him on the chance of their being wanted. While thus engaged Gaspard once fell overboard, but he soon came up again and answered our cry of alarm with renewed hilarity.

"The Garonne knows me," he laughed; "I have often swum it for a league at a time." Then when he had got on the roof again he shook himself and exclaimed, "Come aboard—there's no time to lose!"

The women had fallen on their knees, and Gaspard had to carry Véronique and Marie to the middle of the raft, where he made them sit down. Rose and Agathe slipped off the tiles unaided and joined the girls. At that moment I again glanced toward the church. Aimée was still on the same roof, only she was now leaning against a chimney stack, holding her children aloft with rigidly uplifted arms. The water had risen to her waist.

"Do not worry, Grandfather," said Gaspard. "I promise you that we'll pick her up as we pass by."

Pierre and Jacques were already on the raft. I jumped after them. It tilted over a little on one side but seemed strong enough to carry us all. Gaspard was the last to leave the roof and gave each of us one of the poles which he had in readiness to be used as oars, he himself keeping a very long one, which he handled with great dexterity. He had taken command, and by his instructions we all pressed against the tiles with our poles, trying to shove off. But our efforts were fruitless; the raft seemed to adhere to the roof; at every fresh attempt we made the current hurled us back against the house. We were incurring great danger, for every fresh shock threatened to shatter the boards on which we stood.

Once more we became conscious of our impotency. We had thought ourselves saved, but we still belonged to the greedy river. I even began to regret that the women had left the roof, for I expected every minute to see them hurled into the furious water and carried away. But when I suggested that we should return to the house they one and all rebelled.

"No, no, let us try again," they pleaded, "or die here."

• Gaspard was not laughing now. We multiplied our efforts, weighing on the poles with feverish strength, but all in vain. At last Pierre had an idea. He climbed onto the roof again and with a long rope managed to pull the raft

to the left and get it out of the current. Then after he had jumped onto the raft again a few strokes of our poles enabled us to get into the open.

But Gaspard remembered his promise to rescue my poor Aimée, whose plaintive wail had not once ceased. To effect the rescue it was necessary to cross the street where raged that terrible current against which we had fought so desperately. He cast a questioning look at me. I was overcome. Never had I been placed in so cruel an alternative. Eight lives must be endangered, and yet if for their sakes I hesitated just one moment, I lacked the strength to resist the mother's lugubrious call.

"Yes, yes," I said to Gaspard. "We cannot go without her."

He bent his head in silence and began to ply his pole, taking advantage of such walls as were still standing. We slowly skirted the adjoining house, passing over our own cowsheds, but as soon as we turned the bend of the street we shrieked aloud. The current had captured us again and was carrying us off, forcing us back to our roof.

It lasted only a few seconds. We were indeed whirled away so suddenly that the screams we immediately raised expired amid the deafening crash of the raft against the tiles. It was rent asunder; the shivered boards were scattered, and we were hurled into the foaming whirlpool. I do not know what followed. I only remember that as I fell I saw Aunt Agathe lying at full length on the water, buoyed up by her skirts. Then without a struggle she slowly sank, her head thrown backward.

A sharp pain made me open my eyes. Pierre was dragging me by the hair along the tiles. I remained lying there, stupefied, with open eyes. Pierre had left me to dive again, and in the confusion of my mind I thought it strange when I espied Gaspard on the spot just vacated by my brother. The young man had Véronique in his arms. He laid her near me, plunged in again and brought up Marie, who was so white, rigid and motionless that I thought her dead. Then for the third time he threw himself into the water, but now he sought in vain and returned empty handed. Pierre had joined him; they were talking low, and I could not hear what they said. As they were coming, seemingly quite exhausted, up the incline of the roof I moaned out: "And Aunt Agathe and Jacques and Rose?"

They shook their heads; big tears were welling in their eyes. From the brief, husky words they spoke I gathered that Jacques's brains had been dashed out by a passing beam. Rose had clung to her husband's corpse and been dragged away with it. As for Aunt Agathe, she had not reappeared; we presumed that her body, driven forward by the current, had entered the house beneath us through one of the open windows.

Raising myself, I turned toward the chimney stack which Aimée had been clutching hold of a few moments previously. The flood had risen higher still; Aimée was no longer wailing; I only saw her two stiffened arms holding the children above the water. Then all collapsed: the sheet of water closed over her arms and her babes amid the sleepy glimmer of the full moon.

CHAPTER V

DARKNESS

THERE WERE now only five of us on the roof. The water had left us but a narrow dry strip on the crest of the tiles. One of the chimney stacks had been swept away. We had to raise Véronique and Marie, who had fainted, and keep them erect to prevent the surf from wetting their legs. At last they regained consciousness, and our anguish increased as we saw them shivering in their soaked garments and heard them wailing that they would not die. We comforted them as one comforts children, assuring them that they were not going to die, that we would prevent death from taking them. But they no longer believed us; they realized that their life was nearly spent. Each time that the word "die" fell like a knell from their lips their teeth chattered, and mutual dread threw them into each other's arms.

It was the end. A few ruined walls marked here and there the spot where the submerged village had stood. The church, alone intact, raised its belfry on high, and a sound of voices still proceeded from it, telling of people who were safely sheltered. In the distance the vast overflow of the raging waters roared continuously. We no longer heard the crash of crumbling houses, resembling the rough unloading of gravel on a road. The wreck was forsaken as if it were in mid-ocean, a thousand miles from land.

Once we fancied that we detected a splash of oars on our left: it was like a rhythmical, gentle beat growing clearer and nearer. Ah, what a hopeful music it seemed! We craned our necks forward to question space. We held our breath. But we saw nothing. The yellow expanse stretched out, spotted with black, shadowy things, but none of those things, crests of trees, fragments of shattered walls, were stirring. Tufts of herbage, empty barrels, planks, brought us delusive joys. We waved our handkerchiefs till, recognizing our error, we again became the prey of anxiety, wondering whence came the sound that ever fell upon our ears.

"Ah, I see it!" suddenly cried Gaspard. "A large boat—look, over there!"

And with his outstretched arm he pointed to a distant spot. Neither Pierre nor I could distinguish anything, but Gaspard obstinately insisted that it was a boat. The strokes of the oars became more distinct, and finally we all saw it. It was moving slowly, and it seemed to be circling round us without drawing any nearer. I remember that we then became almost mad, waving our arms, raving, shouting, insanely apostrophizing the boat, insulting it and calling it a coward. The craft, still silent and dark, appeared to turn more slowly. Was it really a boat? I cannot tell; I only know that when we realized that it was gone we felt that it had carried our last hope away.

After that we expected every second to be engulfed in the fall of the house. By this time it must be undermined and was probably only held up by some stouter wall, which would drag down the whole building when it gave way. What especially terrified me was to feel the roof sinking under our weight;

the house might possibly have resisted all night, but the tiles were loosened and broken by the attacking beams. We took refuge on the left, where the rafters seemed to be less impaired, but even there they soon seemed to weaken and would infallibly yield if the five of us remained together on so narrow a space.

For the last few moments my brother Pierre had mechanically placed his pipe between his lips again. He was twisting his thick, military-looking mustache and muttering confusedly, with his dark brows knit. The increasing peril which surrounded us on all sides and against which there was no possible fighting made him more and more irritated. He had two or three times spat into the water with angry contempt; then as we were sinking more and more, he made up his mind and walked down the slope of the roof.

"Pierre! Pierre!" I cried, afraid to understand.

He turned and answered quietly, "Good-by, Louis; this lasts too long to suit me, and my going will give you more room."

Then having thrown his pipe into the water, he resolutely flung himself after it, adding: "Good night; I've had enough of it!"

He did not rise again; he was but an indifferent swimmer, and no doubt he surrendered himself to the flood, brokenhearted by our ruin, the loss of those he loved, and feeling unwilling to survive them.

Two o'clock struck at the church tower. The night was almost over, that horrible night, so full of agony and tears. The dry strip under our feet was gradually becoming smaller. There was a soft gurgle of running water, with little caressing wavelets playing and tossing. Then again the current changed; the wreckage was carried to the right of the village, floating lazily along, as if the flood, now seemingly about to reach its greatest height, were resting, weary and satisfied.

All at once Gaspard removed his shoes and coat. During the last moment or two I had watched him wringing his hands and crushing his fingers. In answer to my question he said: "Listen, Grandfather. It kills me to wait here. I cannot stop any longer. Let me act—I can save her!"

He was alluding to Véronique. I attempted to reason with him, saying that he would never be strong enough to swim with the girl as far as the church. But he obstinately insisted, repeating: "I love her—I shall save her!"

I remained silent, simply drawing Marie to my breast. He thought, no doubt, that I was reproaching him with his loverlike selfishness.

"I will come back for Marie," he stammered; "I swear it. I will find a boat somehow and manage to get help. Trust me, Grandfather!"

He stripped, merely retaining his trousers, and then in a low and hurried voice he gave some urgent advice to Véronique, telling her not to struggle but to yield herself to him and, above all, not to get alarmed. The girl stared at him and huskily answered "Yes" to each sentence he spoke.

At last, having made the sign of the cross, although he was not habitually devout, he let himself slide down the roof, holding Véronique by a rope which he had passed under her arms. She gave a loud scream, beat the water with her limbs and fainted away.

"It is best so!" shouted Gaspard. "Now I can answer for her."

With unspeakable anguish I watched their progress. On the white water I easily discerned Gaspard's slightest movements; he supported the girl by means of the rope which he had also twined around himself, and he had thrown her partially across his right shoulder. Her dead weight occasionally made him sink, but he rallied, swimming on with supernatural energy.

I was getting hopeful, for he had already covered one third of the distance, when he struck against some obstacle—some wall hidden below the water's surface. The shock was appalling; they both disappeared. Then I saw Gaspard rise alone; the rope had broken. He plunged twice, and finally he reappeared, again carrying Véronique. He slung her upon his back, but as the supporting rope was gone, she weighed him down more heavily than before. In spite of this he was still advancing. A moment later, as they neared the church, I began to tremble violently; then suddenly I attempted to call out, for I had caught sight of some floating timber coming upon them sideways. My mouth remained wide open; a second concussion parted them; then the waters met again, but they were gone.

From that moment I remained stupefied, retaining merely the animal instinct of self-preservation and shrinking back whenever the water gained on me. Amid this stupor I continued hearing a sound of laughter without understanding whence it came. The day was rising in a great white dawn; the air was pleasant, very fresh and very calm, as it is beside a mere before the sunrise. But laughter still rang out, and on turning round I saw Marie standing near me in her dripping garments. It was she who was laughing!

How sweet and gentle she looked, poor darling, amid the advent of the morning! I saw her stoop, take a little water in the hollow of her palm and bathe her face. Then she twisted her rich golden hair and bound it round her head. She was dressing; she fancied herself back in her little room preparing for church on a Sunday morning while the bells were ringing merrily, and still she laughed her childish laughter, with a happy face and serene, clear eyes.

Her madness was contagious, for I began to laugh with her; terror had demented her, and it was a mercy vouchsafed by heaven, for she seemed conscious only of the enchanting beauty of the springtide dawn.

I watched her quietly, nodding gently and without comprehending. She went on with her toilet till she considered herself ready to start, and then, raising her pure crystalline voice, she began to sing one of her favorite hymns. Presently, however, she stopped, and, as if answering a call which she alone could hear, she cried: "I am coming! I am coming!"

Then resuming her chant, she descended the incline of the roof and stepped into the water, which softly, tenderly, closed over her without shock or struggle. For myself, I continued to smile, looking with a happy, contented face on the spot where she had disappeared.

After that I do not remember. I was quite alone on the roof, the water touching me. A single chimney stack remained standing, and I think I must

have clung to it with all my strength, like an animal who refuses to perish. Beyond that I know nothing—nothing—all is black and vacant in my mind.

CHAPTER VI

HEROIC LOVE

WHY AM I HERE? I have been told that the people of Saintin arrived at about six o'clock with their boats and found me in a dead faint, hanging onto the chimney. The water had been so cruel as not to take me away with those I loved while I remained unconscious of my bereavement.

I—the old one—have obstinately lived on. All the others are gone, the children in swaddling clothes, the girls and their lovers, the young and the old married couples. And yet I remain living like a coarse, dry weed rooted to the stones. If I had the courage I would do what Pierre did. Like him, I would say, "Good night; I have had enough of this," and then I would fling myself into the Garonne, following the course that all the others have taken. I have not one child left me; my house is a ruin; my fields lie waste. Oh, for the nights when we all sat at the table, the elders in the center, the young ones in a row, when their merriment warmed my blood! Oh, for the grand days of harvest and vintage, when we all toiled together and came home in the gloaming, exultant in the pride of our wealth! Oh, for the handsome children and the fair vines, the lovely girls and the golden corn, the joy of my old age, the living reward of my whole life! Now that all this is dead and gone, tell me, O God, why wilt Thou have me stay?

I cannot be comforted. I want no help. I shall give my land to those of the village folk who possess children, for they will have the heart to clear it and till it afresh. Those who have no children need but a corner wherein to die.

I have had one wish, a last desire—I wanted to find the corpses of my dear ones and to bury them in our churchyard under a stone which would someday cover me also. I heard that a great many bodies which had been washed away by the river had been recovered at Toulouse, so I started to go and see them.

Was there ever so ghastly a scene? Nearly two thousand houses destroyed, seven hundred victims, all the bridges swept away, a whole district of the city razed, drowned in the mud; poignant tragedies, twenty thousand wretches half naked and dying of starvation, the town poisoned by the stench of unburied corpses and terrified by the fear of typhus. And mourning everywhere, funerals in all the streets, distress such as no alms could allay. But I walked on among the ruins of others, regardless of aught save my own—my own dear dead, the thought of whom weighed me down.

People told me that many bodies had been found and that they had already been buried in long rows in the cemetery. However, the precaution had been taken to photograph the unrecognized ones. It was among the piteous portraits shown me that I came across those of Gaspard and Véronique. The lovers were still clasped in a passionate embrace; they had given and received

their nuptial kiss in death. They clung to each other so closely, mouth pressed to mouth and arms entwined, that it would have been impossible to part them without breaking their limbs. So they had been photographed together, and they slept united beneath the sod.

And that is all I have left, that horrible picture of those two fair children, disfigured and swollen by the water, but still bearing on their livid faces the imprint of their heroic love. I gaze upon them and I weep.

NANTAS

CHAPTER I

HIS ROOM

THE ROOM in which Nantas had resided since his arrival from Marseilles was on the top floor of a house in the Rue de Lille, next to the mansion of Baron Danvilliers, a member of the Council of State. This house belonged to the baron, who had built it on the site of some old outbuildings. By leaning out of his window Nantas could see a corner of the baron's garden, across which some magnificent trees cast their shade. Beyond, by looking over their leafy crests, a glimpse of Paris was to be had: the open space left by the Seine, with the Tuileries, the Louvre, the quays, a whole sea of roofs and the Père Lachaise Cemetery in the dim distance.

Nantas's room was a small attic with a dormer window amid the tiles. He had furnished it simply with a bed, a table and a chair. He had taken up his abode there because he was attracted by the low rent and had made up his mind to rough it until he found a situation of some kind. The dirty paper, the black ceiling, the general misery and barrenness of this garret did not deter him. Living in sight of the Louvre and the Tuileries, he compared himself with a general sleeping in some miserable inn at the roadside, within view of the wealthy city which he means to carry by assault on the morrow.

Nantas's story was a short one. The son of a Marseilles mason, he had begun his studies at the lycée in that city, stimulated by the ambitious affection of his mother, who had set her heart upon making a gentleman of him. His parents had stinted themselves to give him a good education, but, his mother having died, Nantas had been obliged to accept an unprofitable situation in the office of a merchant, where for twelve years he had led a life of exasperating monotony. He would have taken himself off a score of times if his sense of filial duty had not tied him to Marseilles, for his father, who had fallen from a scaffolding, was quite unable to work. One night, however, when Nantas returned home, he found the old fellow dead, with his pipe lying still warm at his side. Three days later the young man had sold the few sticks about the place and started for Paris with just two hundred francs in his pocket.

Nantas had inherited boundless ambition from his mother. He was a young fellow of ready decision and firm will, and even when quite a boy he had been wont to say that he was a power. He was often laughed at when he so far forgot himself as to repeat his favorite expression confidently, "I am a power," an expression which sounded comical, indeed, when one looked at him in his thin black coat, all out at the elbows and with the cuffs halfway up his arms. However, he had gradually made power a religion, seeing nothing else in the world and feeling convinced that the strong are necessarily the successful. According to his idea, to be willing and able ought to suffice one. All the rest was of no importance.

One Sunday while he was walking about alone in the scorching suburbs of Marseilles, he felt genius within him; in his innermost being there was, as it

were, an instinctive impulse driving him onward, and when he went home to eat a plateful of potatoes with his bedridden father he determined in his own mind that someday or other he would carve his own way in that world in which, at the age of thirty, he was still a nonentity. This was no low greed, no appetite for vulgar pleasures, on his part; it was the clearly defined longing of a will and intellect which, not being in their proper sphere, strove to attain to that sphere by the natural force of logic.

As soon as Nantas felt the paving stones of Paris under his feet he thought that he had merely to put forth his hands to find a situation worthy of him. On the very first day he began his search. He had been given various letters of introduction, which he presented, and, moreover, he called upon several of his own countrymen, thinking that they would help him. But at the end of a month there was still no result. The times were bad, people said; besides which, they merely made promises to break them. His little store of money was swiftly diminishing—indeed, at the most, some twenty francs were left him. It was upon those twenty francs, however, that he was forced to live for another month, eating nothing but bread, scouring Paris from morning till evening and going home to bed without a light, feeling tired to death and still as poor as ever. His courage did not fail him, but mute anger arose within him. Destiny appeared to be illogical and unjust.

One evening Nantas returned home supperless. He had finished his last morsel of bread on the day before. No money and not a friend to lend him even a franc. Rain had been falling all day, one of those raw downfalls which are so cold in Paris. Rivers of mud were running in the streets, and Nantas, drenched to the skin, had gone to Bercy and afterward to Montmartre, where he had been told of employment. But the situation at Bercy was filled, and at Montmartre they had decided that his handwriting was not good enough. Those were his two last hopes. He would have accepted anything, with the certainty that he would soon command success. He only asked for bread at first, something to live upon in Paris, a foundation stone upon which he might build his fortune. He walked slowly from Montmartre to the Rue de Lille with his heart full of bitterness. The rain had ceased falling, and busy throngs crowded the streets. He stopped for a few minutes in front of a money-changer's office. Five francs would perhaps suffice him to become one day the master of them all. On five francs he could indeed live for a week, and in a week a man may achieve great things. While he was dreaming thus a cab ran against him and splashed him with mud. He then walked on more quickly, setting his teeth and experiencing a savage desire to rush with clenched fists upon the crowd which barred his way. It would have been taking a kind of vengeance for the cruelty of fate.

In the Rue Richelieu he was almost run over by an omnibus, but he made his way to the Place du Carrousel, whence he threw a jealous glance at the Tuileries. On the Saints-Pères Bridge a little well-dressed girl obliged him to deviate from the straight path which he was following with the obstinacy of a wild boar tracked by hounds, and this deviation appeared to him a supreme humiliation. The very children impeded his progress! Finally when he had

taken refuge in his room, as a wounded animal returns to its lair to die, he threw himself heavily upon his chair, dead-beat, gazing at his trousers which the mud had stiffened and at his worn-out boots which had left wet marks along the floor.

The end had come then. Nantas debated how he should kill himself. His pride held good, and he imagined that his suicide would injure Paris. To be a power, to feel one's own worth and not to find a soul to appreciate you, not one to give you the first crown which you have ever wanted! It seemed monstrous to him, and his whole being revolted at the thought. Then he felt immense regret as his glance fell upon his useless arms. No work had any terror for him. With the tip of his little finger he would have raised the world, and yet there he was, cast into a corner, reduced to impotence and fuming with impatience like a caged lion! But presently he became calmer; death seemed to him grander. When he was a little boy he had been told the story of an inventor who, having constructed a marvelous machine, had one day smashed it to pieces with a hammer because of the indifference of the world. Well, he was like that man; he bore within him a new force, a rare mechanism of intelligence and will, and he was about to destroy his machine by dashing out his brains in the street.

The sun was going down behind the tall trees of the Danvilliers mansion; an autumn sun it was, with golden rays lighting up the yellow leaves. Nantas rose as if attracted by the farewell beams of the heavenly body. He was about to die; he wanted light. For a moment he leaned out of the window. Between the masses of foliage he had often seen a tall, fair young girl walking with a queenly step in the garden. He was not romantic; he had passed that age when young men in garrets dream that wellborn ladies approach them with their love and fortunes. Yet it chanced that at this supreme hour of suicide he suddenly recollected that fair and haughty girl. What could be her name? He knew not. But at the same time he clenched his fists, for his only feeling was one of hatred for the inhabitants of that mansion, glimpses of whose luxury were afforded him by the partially opened windows, and he muttered in a burst of rage:

"I would sell myself; I would sell myself if someone would only give me the first coppers I need for my fortune to come!"

This idea of selling himself occupied his mind for a moment. If there had been such a place as a pawnshop where people advanced money on energy and willingness, he would have gone and pledged himself. He set about imagining cases: a politician might buy him to make a tool of him, a banker to make use of every atom of his intelligence; and he accepted, scorning honor and telling himself that it would suffice if he someday acquired strength and ended by winning the fight. Then he smiled. Did a man ever get a chance to sell himself? Rogues, who watch every opportunity, die of want without finding a purchaser. Now that suicide seemed his only course he was fearful lest he should be overcome by cowardice, and he tried in this way to divert his thoughts. He had sat down again, swearing that he would throw himself out of the window as soon as it was dark.

So great was his fatigue, however, that he fell asleep upon his chair. Suddenly he was awakened by the sound of a voice. It was the doorkeeper of the house, who was showing a lady into his room.

"Sir," the doorkeeper began, "I took the liberty to come up——"

Then seeing no light in the room, she quickly went downstairs and fetched a candle. She seemed to know the person whom she had brought with her and showed herself at once complaisant and respectful.

"There," she said, on leaving the room after placing the candle on the table, "you can talk at your ease; nobody will disturb you."

Nantas, who had awakened with a start, looked with astonishment at the lady who had called upon him. She had now raised her veil and appeared to be about five and forty, short, very stout and with the face of a devotee. He had never seen her before. When he offered her the only chair, casting an inquiring glance at her, she gave her name: "Mademoiselle Chuin—I have come, sir, to talk to you about a very important matter."

Nantas had sat down on the edge of the bed. The name of Mlle Chuin told him nothing, and his only course was to wait until she should think fit to explain herself. But she seemed in no hurry to do so; she had given a glance round the tiny room and appeared to be hesitating as to the way in which she might start the conversation. Finally she spoke in a very gentle voice, emphasizing her remarks with a smile.

"Well, sir, I come as a friend. I have been told your touching story. Do not think that I am a spy; my only wish is to be of use to you. I know how full of trials your life has been till now, with what courage you have struggled to find a situation and the final result of all your painful efforts. Once more, sir, forgive me for intruding upon you. I assure you that sympathy alone——"

Nantas, however, did not interrupt her; his curiosity was aroused, and he surmised that the doorkeeper of the house had furnished the lady with all those particulars. Mlle Chuin, being at liberty to continue, seemed solely desirous of paying compliments and putting things in the most attractive way.

"You have a great future before you, sir," she resumed. "I have taken the liberty to follow your endeavors, and I have been greatly struck by your praiseworthy courage in misfortune. In one word, in my opinion there is a great future before you if someone gives you a helping hand."

She stopped again. She was waiting for a word. The young man, who believed that the lady had come to offer him a situation, replied that he would accept anything. But she, now that the ice was broken, asked him point-blank:

"Would you have any objection to marry?"

"Marry!" cried Nantas. "Goodness, madame, who would have me? Some poor girl that I could not even feed!"

"No, a very pretty girl, very rich, splendidly connected, and who will at once put you in possession of the means to attain to the highest position."

Nantas laughed no longer.

"Then what are the terms?" he asked, instinctively lowering his voice.

"The girl has had a misfortune, and you must assume responsibility," said

Mlle Chuin, and, putting aside her unctuous phraseology in her desire to come straight to the point, she gave some details.

Nantas's first impulse was to turn her out of doors.

"It's an infamous thing to propose," he muttered.

"Infamous!" exclaimed Mlle Chuin, affecting her honied tones again. "I can't admit that ugly word. The truth is, sir, that you will save a family from despair. Her father knows nothing as yet; this misfortune has not long fallen upon her, and it was I myself who conceived the idea of thus marrying her as soon as possible. I know her father; it would kill him if nothing were done. My plan would soften the blow; he would think the wrong half redressed. The unfortunate part of it is that the real culprit is married. Ah, sir, there are men who really have no moral sense."

She might have gone on like this for a long while, for Nantas was not listening to her. He was thinking, why should he refuse? Had he not been proposing to sell himself a little while back? Very well, here was a buyer. Fair exchange is no robbery. He would give his name, and he would be given a situation. It was an ordinary contract. He looked at his muddy trousers and felt that he had eaten nothing since the day before; all the disgust born of two months' struggling and humiliation rose up within him. At last he was about to set his foot on the world which had repulsed him and driven him to the verge of suicide!

"I accept," he said curtly.

Then he asked for clear explanations from Mlle Chuin. What did she want for her services? She protested at first that she wanted nothing. However, she ended by claiming twenty thousand francs out of the dowry which the young man would receive. And as he did not haggle over the terms, she became expansive.

"Listen," she said, "it was I who thought of you, and the young lady did not refuse when I mentioned your name. Oh, you will thank me later on. I might have got a title; I know a man who would have jumped at the chance. But I preferred to choose someone outside of the poor child's sphere. It will appear more romantic. And then I like you. You are good looking and have plenty of sense. You will make your way, and you mustn't forget me. Remember that I am devoted to you."

So far no name had been mentioned, and upon Nantas making an inquiry in this respect the old maid stood up and said, introducing herself afresh:

"Mlle Chuin; I have been living as governess in Baron Danvilliers's family since the baroness's death. I educated Mademoiselle Flavie—the baron's daughter. Mademoiselle Flavie is the young lady in question."

Then she withdrew after formally placing on the table an envelope containing a five-hundred-franc note. It was an advance which she herself made to defray preliminary expenses.

When Nantas found himself alone he went to the window again. The night was very dark; nothing was to be seen but the dark masses of shadow cast by the trees; one window only in the gloomy frontage of the mansion showed a light. So it was that tall, fair girl who walked with such a queenly step and

did not deign to notice him. She or some other, what mattered it? The girl was no part of the bargain. Then Nantas raised his eyes still higher, upon Paris roaring in the gloom, upon the quays, the streets, the squares, upon the whole left bank of the river, illuminated by the flickering gaslights, and like a superior being he addressed the city, saying:

"Now you are mine!"

CHAPTER II

THE BARON

BARON DANVILLIERS was sitting in the room which served him as a study, a cold, lofty apartment, furnished with old-fashioned leather-covered furniture. For the last two days he had been in a state of stupor, Mlle Chuin having informed him of what had befallen Flavie. In vain had she softened and toned down the facts; the old man had been overcome by the blow, and it was only the thought that the culprit was in a position to offer the sole reparation possible that kept him from death. That morning he was waiting the visit of this man, who was utterly unknown to him but who had robbed him of his daughter. He rang the bell.

"Joseph, a young man will call, whom you will show in here at once. I am not at home to anybody else," he said.

Sitting alone at his fireside, he brooded bitterly. The son of a mason, a starveling without any position! Mlle Chuin had certainly spoken of him as a promising youth, but what a disgrace to a family whose honor had hitherto been stainless! Flavie had accused herself with a kind of passionate eagerness so as to acquit her governess of the slightest blame. Since the painful scene between them she had kept to her room, and, indeed, the baron had refused to see her. Before forgiving her he was determined to look into the matter. All his plans were laid. But his hair had grown whiter, and his head shook with age.

"Monsieur Nantas," announced Joseph.

The baron did not rise. He simply turned his head and looked fixedly at Nantas, who walked forward. The latter had had the good sense not to yield to any desire to dress himself up; he had simply bought a black coat and a pair of trousers, which were decent but very worn and gave him the appearance of a poor but careful student, with nothing of the adventurer about him. He stopped in the middle of the room and waited, standing up, but without humility.

"So it is you, sir," stammered the old man.

But he could not continue, for his emotion choked him, and he feared lest he might commit some act of violence. After a pause he said simply, "You have committed a wicked deed, sir."

Then when Nantas was about to make some excuse he repeated more emphatically, "A wicked deed. I wish to know nothing; I request you to explain nothing to me. In fact, no explanation can lessen your crime. Only robbers break in upon families in this way."

Nantas hung his head again.

"It is making money very easily, setting a trap in which one is certain of catching both child and father."

"Allow me, sir," interrupted the young man, stung by these words.

But the baron made a violent gesture.

"What? Why should I allow anything? It is not for you to speak here. I am telling you what I am in duty bound to tell you and what you are bound to hear, since you come before me as a culprit. Look at this house. Our family has lived here for more than three centuries without reproach. Standing here, are you not conscious of our ancient honor and dignity? Well, sir, you have trifled with all that. It nearly killed me, and today my hands tremble as if I had suddenly grown ten years older. Be silent and listen to me."

Nantas had turned very pale. He had taken a difficult part upon himself. He felt anxious to make the blindness of passionate love serve as his pretext.

"I lost my head," he muttered, trying to make up some tale. "I could not look at Mademoiselle Flavie—"

At his daughter's name the baron rose and cried in a voice like thunder:

"Silence! I have told you that I do not wish to know anything. Whatever happened matters little to me. I have asked her nothing, and I ask you nothing. Keep your confessions to yourselves, I will have nothing to do with them."

Then he sat down again, trembling and exhausted. Nantas bent his head, feeling deeply moved, in spite of the command he had over himself. After a pause the old man continued in the dry tone of a person discussing business matters:

"I beg pardon, sir. I had determined to keep cool but failed. You are not at my disposal; I am at yours, since I am in your power. You are here to carry out a transaction which has become necessary. To business, sir."

And thenceforward he affected to speak like a lawyer, settling as agreeably as possible some shameful case in which he was loath to dabble. He began formally: "Mademoiselle Flavie Danvilliers inherited at the death of her mother a sum of two hundred thousand francs, which she was not to receive until her marriage. That sum has produced interest, but here are the accounts of my guardianship which I will communicate to you."

He opened a book and began to read some figures. Nantas in vain tried to stop him. Emotion seized him in the presence of this old man, who appeared so upright and simple and who seemed to him so great because he was so calm.

"Finally," the baron concluded, "I bestow on you, by an agreement which my notary drew up this morning, another sum of two hundred thousand francs. I know that you have nothing. You can draw those two hundred thousand francs at my banker's on the day after the marriage."

"But I don't ask for your money, sir," said Nantas. "I only want your daughter."

The baron cut him short.

"You have not the right to refuse," he said, "and my daughter could not marry a man with less money than herself. I give you the dowry which I in-

tended for her; that is all. Possibly you reckoned on more, for I have the credit of being richer than I really am."

And as the young man remained mute at this last thrust the baron put an end to the interview by ringing the bell.

"Joseph, tell Mademoiselle Flavie that I want her in my room at once."

He had risen from his chair and now began to walk slowly about the room. Nantas remained motionless. He was deceiving this old man, and he felt small and powerless before him. At last Flavie appeared.

"My child," said the baron, "here is the man. The marriage will take place as soon as possible."

Then he went out of the room, leaving them alone, as if, so far as he was concerned, the marriage were over.

When the door was shut silence reigned. Nantas and Flavie looked at one another. They had never met before. He thought her very handsome with her pale and haughty face and her large gray eyes which never drooped. Perhaps she had been crying during the three days that she had spent in her room; however, the coldness of her cheeks must have frozen her tears. She it was who spoke first.

"Then the matter is settled, sir?" she said.

"Yes, madame," replied Nantas simply.

Her face contracted involuntarily as she cast a long look at him, a look which seemed to be fathoming his baseness.

"Well, so much the better," she continued. "I was afraid I should not find anyone to agree to such a bargain."

Nantas could distinguish in her voice all the scorn which she felt for him, but he raised his head. If he had trembled before the father, knowing that he was deceiving him, he determined to be firm with the daughter, who was his accomplice.

"Excuse me, madame," he said calmly and with the greatest politeness. "I think you misconceive the position in which what you rightly call the bargain has placed us. I apprehend that from today forth we are on a footing of perfect equality."

"Indeed!" interrupted Flavie with a scornful smile.

"Yes, perfect equality. You require a name in order to conceal a fault which I do not presume to condemn, and I give you my name. On my side I require money and a certain social position in order to carry out some great enterprise, and you furnish me with that money and position. We thus become two partners whose capitals balance. It only remains for us to express our mutual thanks for the service which we are rendering to one another."

She smiled no longer; indeed, a look of irritated pride appeared upon her face. After a pause she asked him, "You know my conditions?"

"No, madame," said Nantas, preserving perfect calmness. "Be good enough to name them. I agree to them in advance."

Upon this she spoke as follows, without hesitating or blushing: "Our lives will remain completely distinct and separate. You will give up all rights over me, and I shall owe no duty toward you."

At each sentence Nantas made an affirmative sign. This was precisely what he desired.

"If I thought it part of my duty to be gallant," he said, "I should assert that such conditions would drive me to despair. But we are above empty compliments. I am pleased to see that you have such a correct appreciation of our respective positions. We are not entering upon life by the path of roses. I only ask one thing of you, madame, which is that you will not make use of the liberty I shall accord you in such a way as to necessitate any interference on my part."

"What, sir!" exclaimed Flavie violently, her pride revolting.

Nantas bowed respectfully and entreated her not to be offended. Their position was a delicate one; they must both of them put up with certain allusions, without which a perfect understanding would be impossible. He refrained from insisting further. Mlle Chuin, in a second interview, had given him further particulars and had named to him a certain M. des Fondettes as the person to whom all the trouble was due.

Suddenly Nantas felt a friendly impulse. Like all those who are conscious of their own power, he was fond of being good-natured.

"Listen, madame," he exclaimed. "We don't know one another, but it would be really wrong of us to hate one another at first sight. Perhaps we are made to understand each other. I can see that you despise me, but perhaps that is because you do not know my story."

Then he began to talk feverishly, throwing himself into a state of excitement as he spoke of his life, his ambition and his desperate, fruitless efforts in Paris. Then he displayed his scorn of what he called social conventionalism, in which ordinary men became entangled. What mattered the opinion of the world, he asked, when a man had his foot on it? He must show his superiority. Power was an excuse for all. And in glowing terms he painted the sovereign existence which he would make for himself. He feared no further obstacle; nothing prevailed against power. He would be powerful and, therefore, he would be happy.

"Don't imagine that I am miserably sordid," he continued. "I am not selling myself for your fortune; I only take your money as a means to rise. Oh, if you only knew what is working within me! If you only knew the burning nights which I have spent, always meditating over the same idea, which was only swept away by the reality of the morrow, then you would understand me! You would then, perhaps, be proud to lean on my arm, saying to yourself that you at least had furnished me with the means to become someone!"

She listened to him in silence without a single movement of her features. And he asked himself a question which he had been turning over in his mind for three days past without being able to find answer to it: Had she noticed him at his window that she had so readily accepted Mlle Chuin's scheme when the latter had mentioned him? The singular idea occurred to him that perhaps she might have loved him with a romantic love if he had indignantly refused the bargain which the governess had proposed to him.

He stopped at last, and Flavie maintained an icy silence. Then, as if he had not made his confession, she repeated in a dry voice: "Then it is understood, our lives completely distinct, absolute liberty."

Nantas at once resumed his ceremonious air and in the curt voice of a man discussing an agreement replied: "It is settled, madame."

Ill pleased with himself, he then withdrew. How was it that he had yielded to the foolish desire to overcome that woman? She was very handsome, but it was better that there should be nothing in common between them, for she might hamper him in life.

CHAPTER III

THE QUESTION

TEN YEARS HAD PASSED. One morning Nantas was sitting in the study in which Baron Danvilliers had given him such a formidable reception on the occasion of their first meeting. That study was now his own; the baron, after being reconciled to his daughter and his son-in-law, had given up the house to them, merely reserving for his own use a little building situated at the other end of the garden and overlooking the Rue de Beaume. In ten years' time Nantas had won for himself one of the highest positions attainable in the financial and mercantile worlds. Having a hand in all the great railway enterprises, engaged in all the land speculations which signalized the earlier period of the Second Empire, he had rapidly accumulated an immense fortune. But his ambition did not halt at that; he was determined to play a part in politics, and he had succeeded to get elected as a deputy in a department where he had several farms. Since taking his seat in the Corps Législatif, he had posed as a future finance minister. Thanks to his practical knowledge and his ready tongue, he was day by day acquiring a more important position. He was skillful enough to effect absolute devotion to the empire, but at the same time he professed theories on financial subjects which made a great stir and which he knew gave the emperor a deal to think of.

On that particular morning Nantas was overlaid with business. The greatest activity prevailed in the spacious offices which he had arranged on the ground floor of the mansion. There was a crowd of clerks, some sitting motionless at wickets and others constantly going backward and forward to the sound of banging doors. Bags of gold lay open and overflowing on the tables. There was a constant ring of precious metal, a tinkling music of wealth such as might have flooded the streets. In the anterooms a crowd was surging; place hunters, financial agents, politicians, all Paris on its knees before power. Great men frequently waited there patiently for an hour at a stretch. And he, sitting at his table, in correspondence with people far and near, able to grasp the world with his outstretched arms, was carrying his former dream of force into fulfillment, conscious that he was the intelligent motor of a colossal machine which moved kingdoms and empires.

Suddenly he rang for his usher. He seemed anxious.

"Germain," he said, "do you know whether your mistress has come in?"

And when the man replied that he did not know, he told him to summon his wife's maid. But Germain did not move.

"Excuse me, sir," he whispered; "the president of the Corps Législatif insists on seeing you."

Nantas made an impatient gesture and replied: "Well, show him in and do as I told you."

On the previous day a speech which Nantas had made on an important budgetary question had produced such an impression that the matter had been referred to a commission to be amended according to his views. After the sitting of the Chamber a rumor had spread that the finance minister intended to resign, and Nantas was at once spoken of as his probable successor. For his part, he shrugged his shoulders; nothing had been done; he had only had an interview with the emperor with regard to certain special points. However, the president's visit might have vast significance. At this thought Nantas tried to throw off the feeling of worry which was weighing on him and rose to grasp his president's hand.

"Ah, Monsieur le Duc," he said, "I beg your pardon. I did not know you were here. Believe me, I am deeply sensible of the honor which you are paying me."

For a minute they talked cordially; then the president, without saying anything definite, gave him to understand that he had been sent by the emperor to sound him. Would he accept the finance portfolio, and what would be his program? Upon this Nantas, with superb calmness, named his conditions. But beneath the impassibility of his face mute triumph was swelling. At last he had mounted the final rung; he was at the top of the ladder. Another step and he would have all heads save that of the sovereign beneath him. As the president concluded, saying that he was going at once to the emperor to communicate Nantas's program, a small door which communicated with the private part of the house opened, and the maid of the financier's wife appeared.

Nantas, suddenly turning pale, stopped short in the middle of a sentence and hurried to the girl, saying to the duke:

"Pray excuse me."

Then he questioned the servant in whispers. Madame had gone out early? Had she said where she was going? When was she expected home? The maid replied vaguely, like a clever girl who did not wish to compromise herself. Understanding the absurdity of the situation, Nantas concluded by remarking, "Tell your mistress as soon as she comes in that I wish to speak to her."

The president of the Chamber, somewhat surprised, had stepped up to a window and was looking into the courtyard. Nantas returned to him, again apologizing. But he had lost his self-possession; he stammered and astonished the duke by his clumsy remarks.

"There, I've spoiled the whole business," he exclaimed aloud when the other had gone. "I've missed the portfolio."

He sat down, feeling disgusted and angry. Several more visitors were then shown in. An engineer had a report to present to him, showing that enor-

mous profits would arise from the working of a certain mine. A diplomatist interviewed him on the subject of a loan which a foreign power wanted to negotiate in Paris. His tools flocked in, rendering account of twenty different schemes. Finally he received a large number of his colleagues of the Chamber, all of whom went into raptures about his speech of the day before.

Leaning back in his chair, he accepted all this flattery without a smile. The clink of gold was still audible in the neighboring rooms; the house seemed to tremble like a factory, as if all that money were manufactured there. He had only to take up a pen to dispatch telegrams which would have spread joy or consternation through the markets of Europe; he could prevent or precipitate war by supporting or opposing the loan of which he had been told; he even held the fate of the French budget in his hands, and he would soon know whether it would be best for him to support or oppose the empire. This was his triumph; his formidable personality had become the axis upon which a world was turning. And yet he did not enjoy his triumph, as he had thought he would. He experienced a feeling of listlessness; his mind was elsewhere, on the alert at the slightest audible sound. Scarcely had a flame, a flush of satisfied ambition, risen to his cheeks than he felt himself turn pale again, as if a cold hand from behind had been laid upon his neck.

Two hours had passed, and Flavie had not yet appeared. Nantas at last called Germain and gave him orders to summon Baron Danvilliers if the old gentleman was at home. Then he began to pace his study, refusing to see anyone else that day. Little by little his agitation had increased. His wife had evidently been to keep some appointment. She must have renewed her acquaintance with M. des Fondettes. The latter's wife had died six months previously. True, Nantas disclaimed any idea of being jealous; during ten years he had strictly observed the agreement to which he had been a party, but he drew the line, as he said, at being made a dupe of. Never would he allow his wife to compromise his position by making him a laughingstock. His strength forsook him as he became a prey to the feelings of a husband who requires respect. He experienced agony such as he had never endured, not even in his most hazardous speculations at the commencement of his career.

At last Flavie entered the room, still in her outdoor costume; she had merely taken off her gloves and hat. Nantas, whose voice trembled, told her that he would have gone to her if he had known that she had come in. But without sitting down she motioned to him to have done quickly.

"Madame," he began, "an explanation has become necessary between us. Where were you this morning?"

Her husband's quivering voice and the pointedness of his question astonished her profoundly.

"Where it pleased me to go," she replied in a cold tone.

"That is exactly what, in future, I must object to," he resumed, turning very pale. "It is your duty to recollect what I said to you: I will not allow you to make use of the liberty I grant you in a way which may bring disgrace upon my name."

Flavie smiled in sovereign disdain.

"Disgrace your name, sir? But that is a question which regards yourself. It is a thing which no longer remains to be done."

Upon this Nantas, wild with passion, advanced as if to strike her.

"You wretched creature!" he stammered. "You have just left Monsieur des Fondettes. You have a lover; I know it!"

"You are wrong," she replied without recoiling; "I have never seen Monsieur des Fondettes again. But even if I had a lover it would not be for you to reproach me. What difference would it make to you? You forget our compact."

He looked at her for a moment with wild eyes; then, choking with sobs and throwing into one cry all the passion which he had so long stifled, he flung himself at her feet.

"Oh, Flavie, I love you!"

Unbending still, she drew back, for he had touched the hem of her dress. But the wretched man followed her, dragging himself upon his knees with his hands uplifted.

"I love you, Flavie; I love you to madness! How it happened I know not. It began years ago, and it grew and grew, till now it has absorbed my whole being. Oh, I have struggled. I thought this passion unworthy of me. I called our first interview to mind. But now I suffer too much. I must speak—"

For a long time he continued thus. It was the shattering of all his principles. This man, who had put his trust in force, who maintained that violation was the sole lever capable of moving the world, was crushed, feeble as a child, disarmed by a woman. And his dream of fortune realized, his present high position, he would have given all for that woman to have raised him by a kiss upon his brow! She marred his triumph. He no longer heard the gold which sounded in his office; he no longer thought of the endless procession of flatterers who came to bow their knees to him; he forgot that the emperor at that moment, perhaps, was summoning him to power. All those things had no existence for him. He possessed everything, save the only thing he wished for—his wife's love. And if she denied it, then he had nothing left him!

"Listen," he continued; "whatever I have done I have done for you. At first, it is true, you were for nothing in it; I simply worked to gratify my own pride. But soon you became the one object of all my thoughts, of all my efforts. I told myself that I must mount as high as possible in order to become worthy of you. I hoped to make you unbend on the day when I should lay my power at your feet. See what I now am. Have I not won your forgiveness? Do not despise me any longer, I entreat you."

As yet she had not spoken. Now, however, she said calmly: "Get up, sir. Somebody might come in."

He refused and still went on entreating. Perhaps he would have bided his time if he had not been jealous of M. des Fondettes. It was that torture which maddened him. At last he became very humble.

"I see that you still despise me. Very well, wait, do not bestow your love on anybody. I can promise you so much that I shall know how to move you. You must forgive me if I was harsh just now. I am out of my senses. Oh, let me hope that you will love me someday!"

"Never!" she answered energetically.

Then as he still remained upon the floor, seemingly crushed, she would have left the room, but suddenly beside himself with fury, he sprang up and caught her by the wrists. A woman braved him thus when the world was at his feet! He was capable of anything, could overthrow states, rule France as he pleased, and yet he could not obtain his wife's love! He, so strong, so powerful, he whose slightest desires were orders, he had but one longing now, and that longing would never be gratified because a creature who was as weak as a child spurned him! He grasped her arms and repeated in a hoarse whisper: "You must, you must——"

"And I will not," replied Flavie, pale and obstinate.

The struggle was still going on when Baron Danvilliers opened the door. On seeing him, Nantas released Flavie and cried:

"Your daughter has just come from her lover, sir! Tell her that a woman should respect her husband's name, even if she does not love him, even if the thought of her own honor does not stand in the way."

The baron, who was greatly aged, remained standing on the threshold, gazing at this violent scene. It was a melancholy surprise for him. He had believed them to be united, and he looked with approval on their ceremonious intercourse in public, considering that to be a mere matter of form. His son-in-law and he belonged to different generations, but although he disliked the financier's somewhat unscrupulous activity, although he condemned certain undertakings which he regarded as undesirable, he was forced to recognize Nantas's strength of will and his quick intellect. And now he suddenly came upon this drama, which he had never even suspected.

When Nantas accused Flavie of having a lover the baron, who still treated his married daughter with the same severity as he had shown her when a child, advanced with a stately step.

"I swear to you that she has just come from her lover's," repeated Nantas, "and look at her; she defies me."

Flavie turned away her head disdainfully. She was arranging her cuffs, which her husband had crushed in his roughness. Not a blush was to be seen on her face. Her father spoke to her.

"My child," he said, "why do you not defend yourself? Can your husband be speaking the truth? Can you have reserved this last grief for my old age? The offense would fall on me as well, for the fault of one member of a family falls upon the others."

Flavie made a gesture of impatience. Her father had well chosen his time to accuse her! For a moment longer she bore his questions, wishing to spare him the shame of an explanation. But as he, in his turn, lost patience, seeing her mute and obstinate, she finally replied, "Father, let this man play his part. You do not know him. For your own sake do not force me to speak out."

"He is your husband," said the old man, "the father of your child."

Flavie started, stung to the quick. "No, no, he is not the father of my child. I will tell you everything now. This man was never my lover, for it would

be at least some excuse for him if he had loved me. This man simply sold himself and agreed to hide another's sin."

The baron turned toward Nantas, who had recoiled, deadly pale.

"Do you hear me, Father?" continued Flavie more violently. "He sold himself, sold himself for money! I have never loved him, and he has never been anything to me. I wished to spare you a great sorrow. I bought him so that he might lie to you. Look at him now. See whether I am not telling you the truth."

Nantas hid his face in his hands.

"And now," resumed the young woman, "he actually wants me to love him. He went down on his knees just now and wept. Some comedy, no doubt! Forgive me for having deceived you, Father, but how can I love such a man? Now that you know all, take me away. Indeed, he treated me with violence just now, and I will not remain here a moment longer."

The baron straightened his bent figure. In silence he stepped forward and gave his arm to his daughter. The two crossed the room without Nantas making a movement to detain them. Then upon reaching the door the old man spoke these two words: "Farewell, sir."

The door closed. Nantas remained alone, crushed, gazing wildly into the void around him. Germain came in and placed a letter on the table; Nantas opened it mechanically and cast his eyes over it. This letter, written by the emperor in person, gave him the appointment of finance minister and was couched in the most flattering terms. He could hardly understand it; the realization of all his ambition did not affect him in the least.

Meanwhile in the neighboring rooms the rattle of money had grown louder; it was the busiest hour of the day, the hour when Nantas's house seemed to shake the world. And he, amid that colossal machinery which was his work, he, at the apogee of his power, with his eyes stupidly fixed on the emperor's letter, gave vent to a childish complaint, the negation of his whole life:

"Ah, how unhappy I am! How unhappy I am!"

Then resting his head upon the table, he wept, and the hot tears that gushed forth from his eyes blotted the letter which appointed him minister of finance.

CHAPTER IV

TOIL

DURING the whole of the eighteen months that Nantas had been a minister he had been trying to drown the past by superhuman toil. On the day after the scene in his study he had had an interview with Baron Danvilliers, and Flavie, acting on her father's advice, had consented to return to her husband's roof. But they spoke no word together, except when they were forced to play a comedy in the eyes of the world. Nantas had determined not to leave his home. In the evening his secretaries came to him from the Ministry, and he got through all his work in his own study.

It was at this period of his life that he performed his greatest deeds. A secret voice suggested lofty and fruitful aspirations to him. Whenever he passed by a murmur of sympathy and admiration was heard. But he remained insensible to eulogy. It may be said that he worked without hope of reward, with the sole idea of performing prodigies, of which the only aim was to compass the impossible. At each step on his upward career he consulted Flavie's face. Was she touched at last? Did she pardon him his former baseness? Had she still any thought save of the development of his intellect? But never did he detect any emotion on that woman's mute countenance, and he said to himself as he redoubled his efforts: "I am not high enough for her yet; I must climb, still climb."

He was determined to compel happiness as he had compelled fortune. All his old belief in his power returned; he would not admit that there was any other lever in this world; it was will which produced humanity. When discouragement seized on him at times he shut himself up so that nobody should witness the weakness of his flesh. His struggles could only be read in his deep-set, dark-circled eyes, in which an ardent fire blazed.

He was devoured by jealousy now. To fail to win Flavie's love was a torture, but the thought that she might care for another drove him mad. By way of asserting her liberty it was quite possible that she might intrigue with M. des Fondettes. Her husband affected not to occupy himself with her, but all the time he endured agony whenever she absented herself, even if it were only for an hour. If he had not feared to make himself look ridiculous he would have followed her in the streets. That course displeasing him, he determined to have someone beside her whose devotion he could purchase.

Mlle Chuin had remained an inmate of the house. The baron was used to her, not to mention that she knew too many things to make it advisable to get rid of her. At one time the old maid had resolved to retire on the twenty thousand francs that Nantas had paid her on the day after his marriage. But she had no doubt calculated that there would be further pickings in such a household. So she awaited her opportunity, having found, moreover, that she needed yet another twenty thousand francs to buy the long-desired notary's house at Roinville, the little market town she came from.

There was no occasion for Nantas to mince matters with this old lady, whose pious mien no longer deceived him. However, on the morning when he called her into his study and openly proposed to her that she should keep him informed as to his wife's slightest actions, she professed to be insulted and asked him what he took her for.

"Come," said he impatiently, "I'm very busy; someone is waiting for me. Let us be brief, please."

But she would listen to nothing which was not couched in proper terms. One of her principles was that things are not ugly in themselves, that they only become ugly or cease to be so according to the way in which they are presented.

"Very well," said Nantas, "a good action is involved in this. I am fearful

that my wife is hiding some sorrow from me. For the last few weeks I have observed that she has been very much depressed, and I thought that you could find out the cause of it."

"You can rely on me," said Mlle Chuin with a maternal outburst on hearing these words. "I am devoted to your wife; I will do anything for her sake or yours. From tomorrow we will keep a watch on her."

Nantas promised to reward the old maid for her services. She pretended to be angry at first, but she had the adroitness to make him fix a sum, and it was agreed that he should give her ten thousand francs upon her furnishing him with positive proof of his wife's conduct, whatever it might be. Little by little they had come to call things by their proper names.

From that time forward Nantas was less uneasy. Three months passed, and he was engaged upon a great task—the preparation of the budget. With the emperor's sanction he had introduced some important modifications into the financial system. He knew that he would be fiercely attacked in the Chamber, and he had to prepare a large quantity of documents. Frequently he sat up all night, and this hard work deadened him, as it were, to emotion and made him patient. Whenever he saw Mlle Chuin he questioned her briefly. Did she know anything? Had his wife paid many visits? Had she stopped long at certain houses? Mlle Chuin kept a journal of the slightest incidents, but so far she had not succeeded in making any important discovery. Nantas felt reassured, while the old woman occasionally blinked her eyes, saying that she should perhaps have some news for him soon.

The truth was that Mlle Chuin had indulged in further reflection. Ten thousand francs was not enough; she needed twenty thousand to purchase the notary's house. She at first thought of selling herself to the wife after having sold herself to the husband. But she knew Flavie, and she was fearful of being dismissed at the first word. For a long time past, before she had even been charged with this matter, she had kept watch over Mme Nantas on her own account, remarking to herself that a servant's profits lie in the master's or mistress's vices. However, she had discovered that she had to deal with a virtue which was all the more rigid since it was based upon pride. One effect of Flavie's stumble had been that it had inspired her with positive hatred for the other sex. So Mlle Chuin was in despair, when one day she met M. des Fondettes in the street, and after they had had some conversation together, realizing that he desired to be reconciled to her mistress, she made up her mind: she would serve both him and Nantas—a combination worthy of genius.

Everything favored her. M. des Fondettes had met Flavie in society and had been scorned by her. He was in despair thereat. At the end of a week's time, after a great parade of feeling on his side and of scruples on that of Mlle Chuin, the matter was settled; he was to give her ten thousand francs, and she was to smuggle him into the house one evening so that he might have a private interview with Flavie.

The arrangement having been effected, Mlle Chuin sought Nantas.

"What have you learned?" he asked, turning pale.

She would not say anything definite at first. But Nantas displayed such furious impatience that before long she told him that M. des Fondettes had an appointment with Flavie that evening in her private apartments.

"Very good—thank you," stammered Nantas. And he sent her off with a wave of the hand; he was afraid of giving way before her.

This abrupt dismissal astonished and delighted the old woman, for she had prepared herself for a long cross-examination and had even prearranged her answers so that she might not contradict herself. She made a bow and then retired, putting on a mournful face.

Nantas had risen. As soon as he was alone he said aloud:

"This evening in her private apartments."

Then he carried his hands to his head, as if he feared it would burst. That appointment under his own roof seemed to him monstrous audacity. He clenched his fists, and his rage made him think of murder. And yet he had his task to finish—those budgetary documents to complete. Three times did he sit down at his table, and three times a heaving of his whole body raised him to his feet again, while behind him something seemed to be urging him to go at once to his wife and denounce her. At last, however, he conquered himself and resumed his work, swearing that he would strangle them both that very evening. It was the greatest victory that he had ever won over his feelings.

That same afternoon Nantas went to submit to the emperor the definite plan of the budget. The sovereign having raised certain objections, he discussed them with perfect clearness. But it became necessary that he should modify an important part of his program—a difficult matter, as the debate was to take place on the next day.

"I will pass the night over it," he said.

And on his way home he thought, "I'll kill them at midnight, and I shall have the whole night afterward to finish this task."

At dinner that evening Baron Danvilliers began talking about the budget, which was making some little stir. He did not approve of all his son-in-law's views on financial matters, but he admitted that they were very broad and very remarkable. While Nantas was replying to the baron he fancied, on several occasions, that he noticed his wife's eyes fixed upon him. She frequently looked at him in that way now. Her glance was not softened, however; she simply listened and seemed to be trying to read his thoughts. Nantas fancied that she feared she was betrayed. Accordingly he made an effort to appear careless; he talked a good deal, affected great animation and finally overcame the objections of his great intellect. Flavie was still looking at him, and suddenly a hardly perceptible glimpse of tenderness darted across her face.

Nantas worked in his study until midnight. Little by little he had become absorbed in his task, and soon he lost consciousness of everything save that creation of his brain, that great financial scheme which he had painfully built up piece by piece in the midst of innumerable obstacles. When the clock struck twelve he instinctively raised his head. Deep silence reigned

in the house. Suddenly he recollected everything. But it was a trial for him to leave his chair; he laid his pen down regretfully and at last took a few steps, as if in obedience to a will which had forsaken him. Then his face flushed, and a flame blazed forth in his eyes. He started for his wife's rooms.

That evening Flavie had dismissed her maid early, saying that she wished to be alone. She had a suite of rooms for her own use. Until midnight she remained in a little boudoir where, stretched upon a sofa, she took up a book and began to read. But again and again the book fell from her hands, and, closing her eyes at last, she became absorbed in thought. Her face still wore a softened expression, and a faint smile played upon it at intervals. Suddenly she started up. There was a knock outside.

"Who is there?" she asked.

"Open the door," replied Nantas.

She was so surprised that she opened it mechanically. Never before had her husband presented himself in this way. He entered the room half distracted; his rage had mastered him while he ascended the stairs. Mlle Chuin, who was watching for him on the landing, had just told him that M. des Fondettes had been there for some hours. Accordingly he was determined to show his wife no mercy.

"There is a man concealed in your rooms," he said.

Flavie did not reply at first, so greatly did these words surprise her. At last she grasped their meaning.

"You are mad, sir!" she answered.

But without stopping to argue he was already looking about him. Then he made his way to the next room. With one bound, however, she threw herself before the door, crying: "You shall not go in. These are my rooms, and you have no right here."

Quivering with passion and looking taller in her pride, she guarded the door. For a moment they stood thus, motionless, speechless, gazing into one another's eyes. Nantas with his head thrust forward, his arms opened, seemed about to throw himself upon her to force a passage.

"Come away," he said in a hoarse whisper. "I'm stronger than you, and go in I will!"

"You shall not; I will not permit it."

And as Nantas kept on repeating accusations, she, without even deigning to deny them, shrugged her shoulders and replied, "Even if it were true what difference can it make to you? Am I not free?"

He recoiled at these words, which struck him like a blow. It was quite true; she was free. A cold shudder ran through him; he plainly realized that she had the best of the argument and that he was playing the part of a feeble and illogical child. He was not observing their compact; his foolish passion had made it hateful to him. Why had he not remained at work in his study? The blood fled from his cheeks, and an indefinable expression of suffering overspread his face. When Flavie saw his pitiable condition she left the door before which she had been standing, while a tender gleam came into her eyes. "Look," she said simply.

And then she passed into the adjoining room herself, carrying a lamp in her hand, while Nantas remained standing at the door. He had made her a sign as if to say that it was sufficient, that he did not wish to enter. But it was she who insisted now. When she had drawn aside the curtains and perceived M. des Fondettes, who had been concealed behind them, so intense was her amazement and horror that she shrieked.

"It was true," she stammered; "it was true this man was here, but I did not know it. On my life I swear it!"

Then with an effort she calmed herself and even seemed to regret the impulse which had prompted her to defend herself.

"You were right, sir, and I crave your pardon," she said to Nantas, endeavoring to speak in her usual tone of voice.

M. des Fondettes, however, felt somewhat foolish and would have given a good deal if the husband had only flown into a passion. But Nantas remained silent. He had simply turned very pale. When he had carried his eyes from M. de Fondettes to Flavie he bowed to the latter, merely saying:

"Excuse me, madame; you are free."

Then he turned and walked away. Something seemed to have broken within him; merely a machinery of muscle and bone still worked. When he reached his study again he walked straight to a drawer where he kept a revolver. Having examined the weapon, he said aloud, as if making a formal engagement with himself: "That suffices; I will kill myself presently."

He turned up his lamp, sat down at his table and quietly resumed his work. Amid the deep silence he completed without an instant's hesitation a sentence that he had previously left unfinished. One by one were fresh sheets of paper covered with writing and set in a heap. Two hours later, when Flavie, who had driven M. des Fondettes from the house, came down with bare feet to listen at the door, she only heard her husband's pen scratching as it traveled over the paper. She bent down and applied her eye to the keyhole. Nantas was still calmly writing; his face was expressive of peace and satisfaction at his work, but a ray of the lamp fell upon the barrel of the revolver at his side.

CHAPTER V

HER REASON

THE HOUSE adjoining the garden of the mansion was now the property of Nantas, who had bought it from his father-in-law. By a personal caprice he had refrained from letting the wretched garret where he had struggled against want for two months after his arrival in Paris. Since he had acquired an enormous fortune he had on more than one occasion felt impelled to go and shut himself up in that little room for hours at a time. It was there that he had suffered, and it was there that he liked to enjoy his triumph. Again, whenever he met with any obstacle he was wont to go there to reflect and to form great resolutions. Once there he again became what he had formerly

been. And now when the hand of death hovered over him, it was in that attic that he determined to meet it.

He did not finish his work until eight o'clock in the morning. Fearing that fatigue might overcome him, he took a cold bath. Then he summoned several of his clerks for the purpose of giving them instructions. When his secretary arrived he had an interview with him, and the secretary received orders to take the plan of the budget to the Tuileries and to furnish certain explanations if the emperor should raise any fresh objections. That settled, Nantas considered that he had done enough. He had left everything in order; he was not going off like a demented bankrupt. After all, he was his own property; he could dispose of himself without being accused of selfishness or cowardice.

Nine o'clock struck. The time had come. But just as he was leaving his study, taking the revolver with him, he had to put up with the final humiliation. Mlle Chuin presented herself to claim the ten thousand francs which he had promised her. He paid her and was forced to put up with her familiarity. She assumed a maternal air and seemed to treat him as a successful pupil. Even if he had had any hesitation left, this shameful complicity would have confirmed him in his intentions. He sought the garret quickly, and in his haste he left the door unlocked.

Nothing was changed there. There were the same rents in the wallpaper; the bed, the table and the chair were still there, with their same old look of poverty. For a moment he inhaled the atmosphere which reminded him of his former struggles. Then he approached the window and caught sight of the same stretch of Paris as formerly: the trees in the garden, the Seine, the quays and a part of the right bank of the river, where the houses rose up in confused masses until they were lost to sight at the point where the Père Lachaise Cemetery appeared in the far distance.

The revolver was lying within his reach on the rickety table. There was no hurry now; he felt certain that nobody would disturb him and that he might kill himself whenever he pleased. He became absorbed in thought, and he reflected that he was at precisely the same point as formerly—led back to the same spot, with the same intention of suicide. One evening before, in that very room, he had determined to dash his brains out. In those days he had been too poor to purchase a pistol; he had only had the stones in the streets at his disposal, but death was awaiting him now as then. Thus in this world death is the only thing which never fails, which is always sure and always ready. Nothing that he knew of was like death; he sought in vain; all else had given way beneath him: death alone remained a certainty. He regretted that he had lived ten years too long. The experience that he had acquired of life in his ascent to fortune and power seemed to him puerile. Why had he put himself to that expenditure of will; what purpose had been served by that waste of force, since will and force were as nothing? One passion had sufficed to destroy him: he had foolishly allowed himself to love Flavie, and now the edifice which he had built up was cracking, collapsing like a mere house of cards swept away by the breath of a child. It was

lamentable; it resembled the punishment that overtakes a marauding school-boy, under whom a branch snaps and who perishes on the spot where he has sinned. Life was a mistake; the best men ended it as tamely as the biggest fools.

Nantas had taken the revolver from the table and slowly raised it. At that supreme moment one last regret made him hesitate for a second. What great things would he not have accomplished if Flavie had understood him! Had she but thrown herself on his neck one day, saying, "I love you!" he would have found a lever to move the world. And his last thought was one of disdain for force and strength, since they which were to have given him everything had not been able to give him Flavie.

He raised the revolver. The morning was a glorious one. Through the open window the sun poured in, lending even a look of brightness to that wretched garret. In the distance Paris was awakening to its giant life. Nantas pressed the weapon to his temple.

But the door was suddenly flung open, and Flavie entered. With one movement she dashed the revolver aside, and the bullet lodged itself in the ceiling. They looked at one another. She was so out of breath, so choked with emotion, that she could not articulate. At last, embracing Nantas for the first time, she spoke the words for which he longed, the only words which could have determined him to live.

"I love you!" she cried, sobbing on his breast and tearing the avowal from her pride, her mastered being. "I love you, for you are truly strong."

NAÏS MICOULIN

CHAPTER I

NAÏS

DURING the fruit season a brown-skinned little girl with bushy black hair used to come every month to the house of M. Rostand, a lawyer of Aix, in Provence, bringing with her a huge basket of apricots or peaches, so heavy that she had hardly strength enough to carry it. She would wait in the large entrance hall, whither all the family went to greet her.

"So it's you, Naïs," the lawyer would say. "You've brought us some fruit, eh? Come, you're a good girl. And how is your father?"

"Quite well, sir," replied the little girl, showing her white teeth

The Mme Rostand would take her into the kitchen and ask her about the olives, the almonds and the vines. But the most important question was whether there had been any rain at L'Estaque, where the Rostands' estate was situated, a place called La Blancarde, which was cultivated by the Micoulins. There were but a few dozen almond and olive trees, but the question of rain was, nonetheless, an important one in this province, where everything perishes from drought.

"There have been a few drops," Naïs would say. "The vines want more."

Then having imparted her news, she ate a piece of bread and some scraps of meat and set out again for L'Estaque in a butcher's cart which came to Aix every fortnight. Frequently she brought some shellfish, a lobster, a fine eel, for Micoulin fished more than he tilled the ground. When she came during the holidays Frédéric, the lawyer's son, used to rush into the kitchen to tell her that the family would soon take up their quarters at La Blancarde and that she must get some nets and lines ready. He was almost like a brother to her, for they had played together as children. Since the age of twelve, however, she had called him "Monsieur Frédéric," out of respect. Every time old Micoulin heard her speak familiarly to the young man he boxed her ears, but in spite of this the two children were sworn allies.

"Don't forget to mend the nets," repeated the schoolboy.

"No fear, Monsieur Frédéric," replied Naïs. "They'll be ready for you."

M. Rostand was very wealthy. He had bought a splendid seignorial mansion in the Rue du Collège at a very low price. The Hôtel de Coiron, built during the latter part of the seventeenth century, had twelve windows in its frontage and contained enough rooms to house a religious order. Amid those vast rooms the family, consisting of five persons, including the two old servants, seemed lost. The lawyer occupied merely the first floor. For ten years he had tried, without success, to let the ground and second floors, and finally he had decided to lock them up, thus abandoning two thirds of the house to the spiders. Echoes like those of a cathedral resounded through the empty, sonorous mansion at the least noise in the entrance hall, an enormous hall with a staircase from which one could easily have obtained sufficient material to build a modern dwelling.

Immediately after his purchase M. Rostand had divided the grand drawing room into two offices by means of a partition. It was a room thirty-six feet long by twenty-four broad, lighted by six windows. Of one of the two parts he had formed his own private room, the other being allotted to his clerks. The first floor contained four other apartments, the smallest of which measured twenty feet by fifteen. Mme Rostand, Frédéric and the two old servants had bedrooms as lofty as churches. The lawyer had been forced, for convenience's sake, to convert an old boudoir into a kitchen, for at an earlier stage, when they had made use of the kitchen on the ground floor, the food, after passing through the chilly atmosphere of the entrance hall and staircase, had come to table quite cold. To make matters worse, the gigantic apartments were furnished in the most sparing manner. In the lawyer's private room an ancient suite of furniture, upholstered in green Utrecht velvet and of the stiff and comfortless-looking Empire style, did its best to fill up the space with its sofa and eight chairs; a little round table, belonging to the same period, looked like a toy in that immensity; on the chimney piece there was nothing beyond a horrible modern marble clock between two vases, while the tiled floor, looking much the worse for age, showed a dirty red. The bedrooms were more empty still. The whole house brought home to one the tranquil disdain which southern families—even the richest of them—display for comfort and luxury in that happy land of the sun, where life is mainly spent out of doors. The Rostands were certainly not conscious of the sad, mortal chilliness which brooded over those huge rooms, mainly through the scantiness and poverty-stricken aspect of the furniture.

Yet the lawyer was a shrewd man. His father had left him one of the best practices in Aix, and he had managed to improve it considerably by displaying an amount of activity rare in that land of indolence. Small, brisk, weasel-faced, his sole thought was of his work. No other matters troubled his brain; he never even looked at a paper during the rare hours of idleness he spent at his club. His wife, on the contrary, had the reputation of being one of the cleverest and most accomplished women in the town. She was a De Villebonne, a fact which invested her with a certain amount of dignity, in spite of her *mésalliance*. But she was strait-laced to such a point, she practiced her religious duties with such bigoted fortitude, that she had, as it were, become shriveled up by the methodical life she led.

As for Frédéric, he grew up between his busy father and rigid mother. During his schoolboy days he was a dunce of the first water, trembling before his mother but having such a distaste for work that he would often sit in the drawing room during the evening, poring for hours over his books without reading a single line, his mind wandering, while his parents imagined from the look of him that he was preparing his lessons. Irritated by his laziness, they put him to board at the college, but he then worked less than ever, being less looked after than at home and delighted to feel that he was no longer under his parents' stern eyes. Accordingly, alarmed by the airs of liberty which he put on, they took him away in order to have him under their ferule again. So narrowly did they look after him that he was forced to work; his mother

examined his exercises, made him repeat his lessons and mounted guard over him unremittingly, like a gendarme. Thanks to this supervision, Frédéric failed but twice in passing the examination for his degree.

Aix is celebrated for its law school, and young Rostand was naturally sent to it. In that ancient town the population is largely composed of barristers, notaries and solicitors practicing at the Appeals Court. A youth takes a law degree as a matter of course, following it up or not as he pleases. So Frédéric remained at the college, working as little as possible but trying to make his parents believe that he was working a great deal. Mme Rostand, to her great sorrow, had been forced to give him more liberty. He now went out when he chose in the daytime and was only expected to be at home to meals. He had, however, to be in by nine o'clock in the evening, except on those days when he was allowed to go to the theater. Thus began that country student's life, so full of vice when it is not entirely devoted to work.

A person must know Aix, be acquainted with the quiet grass-grown streets, the state of torpor which enwraps the whole town, in order to understand the purposeless life which the students lead there. Those who work can manage to kill time over their books, but those who refuse to exert themselves steadily have no other places where they can while away their leisure save the cafés and other resorts, where people gamble and drink and call it "seeing life." Thus Frédéric soon became an inveterate gambler; he passed the greater part of his evenings at cards and finished them elsewhere. When he found his evenings too short for him he managed, by stealing a key of the house door, to have all night as well. In this way his years of probation passed pleasantly enough.

Frédéric had sense enough to see that he must play the part of a tractable son. The hypocrisy of a child curbed by fear had little by little grown upon him. His mother now declared herself satisfied; he took her to church, behaved most properly with her, told her with the greatest calmness the most unheard-of lies, which she believed, thanks to his air of candor. And so clever did he become in this respect that he never allowed himself to be outwitted, being always ready with an excuse, always prepared in advance with the most extraordinary stories in support of his statements. He paid his gaming debts with money borrowed from his cousins, and his pecuniary transactions would have filled a book. Once after an un hoped-for stroke of good luck he was able to turn a dream he had of spending a week in Paris into reality by getting himself invited thither by a friend who had a little estate near the Durance.

Frédéric was a fine young fellow, tall, with regular features and a black beard. His vices made him good company, especially with ladies. He was quoted for his good manners. Those who knew his goings on smiled a little, but, as he had the sense to throw a veil over this side of his life, he came in for a certain amount of credit for not making an exhibition of his excesses, as did other students, who were the scandal of the town.

Frédéric was nearly twenty-one and was soon to pass his last examination. His father, who was still young and not inclined as yet to hand his practice

over to him, talked of making him enter the magistrature to begin with. He had friends in Paris to whom he could apply to get him an appointment as public prosecutor's assessor. The young man raised no objection, for he never openly opposed his parents, but a certain expressive smile on his face betokened his firm determination to prolong the pleasant existence which suited him so well. He knew that his father was rich, that he was his only son, so why should he trouble himself? In the meantime he smoked his cigar on the Promenade, gambled in the neighboring cafés and paid his attentions to a variety of damsels, though all this did not prevent him from holding himself at his mother's orders and loading her with attentions. At times when he felt out of sorts he stayed at home in the huge, gloomy mansion in the Rue du Collège and enjoyed delicious repose. The emptiness of the rooms, the sense of constraint perceptible on every side, seemed to him to possess a soothing influence. There he collected himself afresh, making his mother believe that he was stopping at home for her sake, until the day when, health and appetite having returned, he devised some fresh escapade. In one word, he was the best fellow in the world, so long as his pleasures were not interfered with.

Every year, however, Naïs came to the Rostands with her fish and fruit, and every year she grew. She was of the same age as Frédéric, or, to be correct, she was just three months older. Mme Rostand would often say to her:

"What a big girl you are growing to be, Naïs!"

And Naïs would smile, showing her white teeth. As a rule, Frédéric was not there, but one day during the last year of his probation he was going out when he found Naïs standing in the hall with her basket. He stopped short in astonishment. He did not recognize the girl, though he had seen her only the year before at La Blancarde. Naïs looking superb with her dark face beneath a swarthy covering of thick black hair, her broad shoulders, her supple waist and her magnificent arms, of which the bare wrists were exposed. In a single year she had grown like a young tree.

"You!" he said in hesitating voice.

"Yes, Monsieur Frédéric," replied Naïs, looking him in the face with her big eyes in which a somber fire smoldered. "I've brought some sea urchins. When are you coming? Shall I get the nets ready?"

He was still looking at her and muttering, as if he had not heard her speak: "How handsome you are, Naïs! What is there in you?"

The compliment made her smile. Then as he took her hands playfully, as he had done in the days gone by, she became serious and said in a hoarse whisper: "No, no; not here. Take care! Here comes your mother."

CHAPTER II

FRÉDÉRIC

A FORTNIGHT LATER the Rostand family started for La Blancarde. The lawyer had to rest during the vacation, and September was a charming month at the seaside. The great heat was past, and the nights were deliciously cool.

La Blancarde was not actually in L'Estaque, a village situated on the extreme outskirts of Marseilles and nestling among the rocks which bound the bay. The house was built on a cliff overlooking the village, and its yellow walls, glistening among the pines, could be seen from any part of the bay. It was one of those heavy square buildings, pierced with irregular windows and called "châteaux" in Provence. In front of the house a broad terrace extended, rising almost perpendicularly above the pebbly beach. Behind there was a vast enclosure of poor land, upon which nothing but a few vines, almond or olive trees would grow. One of the inconveniences, indeed, one of the dangers, of La Blancarde was the fact that the sea was gradually eating away the cliff; infiltrations proceeding from neighboring springs were constantly at work in that softening mountain of clay and rock, and every year enormous masses fell away, being precipitated with a deafening crash into the sea. The property was thus becoming smaller and smaller; the pines had already begun to fall.

The Micoulin's had been settled at La Blancarde for forty years. According to the Provençal custom, they cultivated the land and shared the crops with the landlord. These crops were scanty, and they would have died of starvation if, during the summer, they had not turned their attention to the sea. Between tilling and sowing there came an interval of fishing. The family consisted of Micoulin, a stern old man with a black and seamy face, before whom the others trembled; of his wife, a tall woman, whose intellect was dulled by hard toil in the blazing sun; of a son, who at that time was serving on board the Arrogant man-of-war, and of Naïs, whom her father, in spite of her numerous tasks at home, sent to work at a tile manufactory. Rarely did the sound of a laugh or a song enliven the tenants' dwelling, a hovel built against one of the sides of La Blancarde. Micoulin, buried in his reflections, preserved gloomy silence. The two women exhibited toward him that cringing respect which southern wives and daughters always display for the head of the family. It was not often that silence was broken, except if it were by the mother's calls, as she stood with her hands on her hips, her throat ready to burst, shouting out the name of Naïs whenever her daughter disappeared. Naïs heard her a mile away and returned home pale with stifled anger.

The handsome Naïs, as they called her at L'Estaque, was by no means happy. At the age of sixteen Micoulin, on the slightest provocation, would strike her so roughly in the face as to make the blood fly from her nose, and even now, in spite of her twenty years, her bruised shoulders bore the marks of her father's brutality for weeks together. Not that he was cruel; he simply exercised a rigorous rule, insisting on implicit obedience, having in his blood the old Roman feeling of authority over his own family—the authority of life and death. One day Naïs, on being unmercifully threshed, dared to raise her hand to defend herself, and her father came near killing her. After a correction of this kind the girl would throw herself trembling into a dark corner and, with dry eyes, brood over the insult. Black rage would hold her there mute for hours together, gloating over revenge which lay beyond her power. It was her father's blood which rose within her—his blind passion, his furious determination to be the master. When she saw her trembling and submissive

mother humble herself before Micoulin she looked at her with scorn. She would often say, "If I'd a husband like that I'd kill him."

And yet Naïs preferred those days when she was beaten, for his violence was a diversion. At other times she led such a dreary, monotonous life that it almost killed her. Her father forbade her to go down to L'Estaque, keeping her constantly at work at home; even when she had nothing to do it was his will that she should stay there beneath his eyes. Accordingly she looked forward impatiently to September, for as soon as the family took up their quarters at La Blancarde Micoulin's surveillance necessarily became less strict, and Naïs, who was wont to run errands for Mme Rostand, was only too glad to make up for all her imprisonment.

One day the idea struck old Micoulin that this big girl might bring him in a franc or two a day. So he emancipated her and sent her to work at a tile manufactory. Although the labor was severe Naïs felt delighted. She left home early, proceeded to the other side of L'Estaque and remained until evening in the hot sun, turning over the tiles set out to dry. Sad work it made with her hands, but she was freed from her father, and she used to joke with the boys. Here it was, in the midst of this rough toil, that she filled out and became a handsome woman. The blazing sun tinted her face and decked her neck with a ring of amber; her black hair grew and enveloped her, as if to protect her with its flying tresses; her body, continually on the move during the progress of her work, acquired the supple vigor of a young warrior's frame. When she stood up on the beaten ground at her full height amid the ruddy tiles she looked like some Amazon, like a statue suddenly imbued with life by the rain of fire falling from the sky. Micoulin glowered at her with his little eyes on seeing her so fair. She laughed too much; it did not seem to him natural that a girl should be so happy. And he swore to himself he would throttle all lovers, should any ever venture to dangle around her!

Lovers! Naïs might have had them by the dozen, but she gave them no encouragement. She tossed her head at all the youths. Her only friend was a hunchback who was employed at the same manufactory as herself—a little fellow called Toine, whom the Foundling Hospital of Aix had sent to L'Estaque and who remained there, adopted, so to say, by the district. This hunchback had a ringing laugh and a comical profile. Naïs found an attraction in his gentleness. She did what she liked with him and often tormented him when she felt inclined to take vengeance on someone for her father's violence toward herself. All this, however, had no further consequences. People used to make sport of Toine, and Micoulin himself said: "She's welcome to Toine. I know her; she's too proud."

That year when Mme Rostand came to La Blancarde she asked Micoulin to lend her Naïs, one of her servants being ill. Work was slack just then at the manufactory, and, moreover, Micoulin, although brutal toward his own family, was politeness with his master's; he would not have refused, even if the request had been against his wishes. But that very day M. Rostand was forced to go to Paris on sudden and important business, and Frédéric was thus left alone with his mother.

As a rule, on his arrival the young man was mad after outdoor exercise, and, intoxicated by the seaside air, he would go with Micoulin to set or draw up the nets or take long walks with Naïs in the gorges which abound in the neighborhood of L'Estaque. Then his ardor cooled down, and he remained for whole days lying under the pines on the edge of the terrace, half asleep and gazing at the sea, of which the monotonous azure finally palled upon him. As a rule, he had had enough of La Blencarde at the end of a fortnight and was wont to invent some excuse in order to slip off to Marseilles.

That year, on the day after their arrival, Micoulin called Frédéric at sunrise. He was going to take up the traps, the long baskets with a narrow opening in which deep-water fish are caught. But the young man turned a deaf ear to him. Fishing appeared to have lost its attraction, for when he got up he threw himself on his back under the pines and fixed his eyes on the sky. His mother was astonished not to see him set off for one of the long walks from which he usually returned as hungry as a wolf.

"You are not going out?" she asked.

"No, Mother," he replied. "I shall stop with you, as Father is not here."

Micoulin, who heard this, muttered in his dialect: "It won't be long before Monsieur Frédéric's off to Marseilles."

But Frédéric did not go to Marseilles. The week passed by and found him still stretched on his back, simply changing his position whenever the sunrays fell on him. For appearance's sake he had taken a book, but it was little he read; the greater part of the time the book remained lying on the dry pine spikes. The young man did not even look at the sea; with his face turned toward the house, he appeared to be interested in the domestic arrangements, in watching the servants go backward and forward, crossing the terrace at every moment, and whenever it was Naïs who happened to pass him a flash shot from his eyes. But Naïs, although she would slacken her pace and move off with the rhythmical sway of her body, never cast a look behind her.

For several days this comedy went on. In his mother's presence Frédéric treated Naïs almost roughly, as if she had been some awkward servant. Then the young girl would cast her eyes down in pleased bashfulness, as if enjoying the harsh words.

One morning at breakfast she broke a salad bowl, and Frédéric flew into a rage.

"How clumsy she is!" he cried. "Wherever is her head?"

And he jumped up furiously, saying that his trousers were spoiled. A drop of oil had stained his knee, and it sufficed to make him raise the house.

"What are you staring at? Give me a napkin and some water. Come and help me," he said to the girl.

Naïs dipped the corner of a napkin in some water and went down on her knees in front of Frédéric to rub the spot.

"Don't bother," said Mme Rostand. "That will do no good."

But the girl did not let go of her young master's trousers, which she went on rubbing with all the strength of her shapely arms, while he continued scolding her.

"I never saw such clumsiness. She must have brought it close to me on purpose to smash it. If she waited on us at Aix our china would soon be all in pieces," he grumbled.

These reproaches were so out of proportion to the gravity of the offense that Mme Rostand thought proper to try and appease her son as soon as Naïs had gone.

"What have you against the poor girl? One would think that you could not endure her. Be more gentle with her. She is an old playmate of yours, and she is not in the position of an ordinary servant here."

"Oh, she's a nuisance!" replied Frédéric, affecting a rough manner.

That evening at dusk, however, Naïs and Frédéric met in a shady spot at the end of the terrace. They had not yet spoken to one another alone. No one could hear them from the house. The pines filled the still air with a warm, resinous odor. Then Naïs asked in a whisper, in the familiar way of their childhood:

"Why did you scold me so, Frédéric? You were unkind."

Without replying he caught hold of her hands, drew her toward him and kissed her. She made no resistance but afterward went off, while he sat down on the parapet in order not to appear before his mother in his then excited state. Ten minutes afterward the girl was waiting at table with perfect and somewhat proud calmness.

Frédéric and Naïs made no appointments. Late one evening they found themselves together under an olive tree near the edge of the cliff. During dinner their eyes had several times exchanged glances. Then Naïs had gone home, and Frédéric had begun to roam about, possessed by a strange feeling. And, indeed, when after a while he came to the old olive tree he found her there, as if waiting for him. He sat down by her side and put his arm round her waist while she let her head fall upon his shoulder. For a moment they remained silent. The old olive tree with its gnarled limbs covered them with a roof of gray leaves. Before them stretched the sea, motionless beneath the twinkling stars. Marseilles, on the far side of the bay, was hidden by a cloud; on the left the revolving Planier light shone out every minute, piercing the gloom with a yellow ray which suddenly disappeared, and nothing could be softer or more tender than this light, constantly vanishing on the horizon and constantly returning.

"Is your father away?" asked Frédéric.

"I got out of the window," she said in her quiet voice.

They spoke no word of their love. That love came from afar, from the days of their infancy. The dawn was almost rising when they sought their rooms again.

CHAPTER III

LAND OF FIRE

WHAT a glorious month it was! Not one day of rain. The sky, invariably blue, displayed a satiny sheen, unflecked by any cloud. The sun rose a ruddy

crystal and sank in a cloud of golden dust. Yet it was not hot, for the sea breeze came with the sun, and though it died away when he set, the nights were deliciously cool and balmy with the scent of aromatic plants diffusing the sweetness gathered during the day. The country is splendid. From both sides of the bay rocky arms jut out, while in the distance the islands seem to bound the horizon. In fine weather the sea appears to be nothing but a vast basin, a lake of an intense blue. In the distance, at the foot of the mountains, the houses of Marseilles climb up the low hills. When the atmosphere is clear one can see from L'Estaque the gray Joliette pier and the slender masts of the vessels in the port; beyond, houses peep out from among clumps of trees, and the chapel of Notre-Dame-de-la-Garde glitters white against the sky. The coast line winds about and takes broad sweeps before reaching L'Estaque, where manufactories throw out intermittent clouds of smoke. When the sun sinks below the horizon, the sea, almost black, looks as if it were slumbering between the two rocky promontories, whose whiteness is relieved by tinges of yellow and brown, pines, too, showing the dark green foliage against the reddish soil beyond. It is a vast panorama, a glimpse of the east, which departs, however, with the dazzling heat of day.

But L'Estaque has other sights besides the sea. The village, clinging to the mountainside, is traversed by roads which wind through a chaos of shattered rocks. The railway line between Marseilles and Lyons passes amid those masses, crosses bridges thrown over ravines and plunges under the cliffs themselves, remaining there for a distance of some four miles in what is called the tunnel of La Nerthe, the longest tunnel in France. Nothing can equal the savage grandeur of those gorges hollowed out among the hills, those narrow paths winding along at the foot of precipices, those barren mountains planted with pines, uprearing ramparts tinged as with rust and blood. Now and then a pass widens; a field of struggling olive trees fills the hollow of a valley; a lonely house shows its white frontage and closed shutters. Then come other rugged paths, impenetrable thickets, overturned rocks, dried-up torrents—all the surprises of a desert march. Over all, above the black fringe of pines, the sky stretches its expanse of silky blue.

Then there is the narrow line of coast between the rocks and the sea, the red soil pitted with immense holes, from which is taken the clay for tile-making, the chief industry of the district. Everywhere the ground is cracked and sundered, supporting with difficulty a few sickly trees and seemingly parched by a breath of burning passion. The roads are like beds of plaster, in which the traveler sinks to the ankles at every step, and flying clouds of dust powder the hedges at the least puff of wind. Little gray lizards sleep alongside the hot walls, which reverberate like ovens, while from the scorched grass rise whirring clouds of locusts. In the still and heavy air of the sleepy south there is no other sign of life than the grasshopper's monotonous song.

It was in this land of fire that Naïs and Frédéric loved one another for a month. It was as if all the heat of the sky had entered their veins. For the first week they were satisfied with their nightly meetings under the same olive tree on the edge of the cliff. There they tasted untold bliss. The cool

night soothed their fever; they offered their burning cheeks and hands to the passing breeze, refreshing as a mountain spring. The sea broke with its slow, voluptuous dirge over the rocks at their feet; the penetrating odor of seaweed intoxicated them with passion.

Then leaning on one another's arms, they would watch across the bay the lights of Marseilles tingling the water at the mouth of the port with a reflection as of blood, the twinkling gaslights outlining the streets in many a graceful curve, while in the midst of all, above the town, it seemed as if there were a mass of sparkling flame. The garden on the Colline Bonaparte was plainly distinguishable by a double row of lights mounting heavenward. Those innumerable lights above the slumbering bay appeared to be illuminating some fairy town which the dawn would presently sweep away. And the sky, stretching over the black chaos of the horizon, also had its charm for them, a charm which alarmed and made them cling closer to one another. A rain of stars fell. On those clear Provençal nights the constellations resemble living flames. Shuddering beneath the vast space, they bowed their heads, turning their gaze on the solitary flicker of the Planier lighthouse, whose dancing scintillations stirred them, while their lips met again in a kiss.

But one night their eyes fell on the gigantic disk of the moon, glaring upon them with her yellow face. Out at sea a train of fire glittered, as if some enormous fish, some serpent from the depths, were trailing endless folds of golden scales, and then the glitter of Marseilles and the outlines of the gulf were obscured. As the moon rose the light increased; the shadows became more sharply defined. That heavenly witness was unwelcome to them. They feared they might be surprised if they remained so near La Blencarde. So when they next met they left the spot and walked into the shadowy open country. They found a meeting place in a deserted tile field; a ruined shed there concealed a pit in which two kilns remained still open. But the hovel saddened them; they preferred to have the open sky above their heads. So they explored the clay pits; they discovered delightful nooks, perfect little deserts, whence they could hear nothing but the barking of watchdogs. They prolonged their walks, wandering along the rocky coast in the direction of Niolon, following the course of the narrow gorges in search of distant grottoes and crevasses. For a fortnight they thus spent their nights. The moon had now disappeared; the sky had become dark again, but it seemed to them as if La Blencarde was too small to hold their love, as if they needed all the limitless expanse beyond it.

One night, as they were following a path above L'Estaque in order to gain the gorges of La Nerthe, they fancied they could hear a muffled step keeping pace with their own behind a plantation of pines stretching beside the road. They stopped in alarm.

"Do you hear that?" asked Frédéric.

"Yes; some stray dog," whispered Naïs.

And they continued on their way. But at the first bend in the road, after leaving the pines, they distinctly saw a dark object glide behind the rocks. It

was certainly a human being, curiously shaped, looking, indeed, as if it were humpbacked. Naïs uttered an exclamation.

"Wait here," she said quickly.

And then she darted in pursuit of the shadow. Presently Frédéric heard the sound of rapid whispering. She returned, composed, but rather pale.

"What is it?" he asked.

"Nothing," she replied.

Then after a moment's silence she continued: "If you hear any steps don't be alarmed. It's Toine—you know, the hunchback. He wants to keep watch over us."

And, in fact, Frédéric was occasionally conscious of someone following them in the darkness. It was as if a protecting arm were stretched over them. More than once Naïs tried to drive Toine away, but the poor fellow merely asked to be her dog; he would not be seen; he would not be heard; why should he not be allowed to do as he pleased? From that time forward, if the lovers had listened attentively as they kissed in the lonely gorges, they would have caught the sound of smothered sobs behind them. It was Toine, their watchdog, weeping in his horny hands.

But at last those walks no longer sufficed them. They grew emboldened and took advantage of other opportunities to meet. Mme Rostand, who saw nothing, still blamed her son for being overrough toward his old playmate. Yet one day she almost surprised them kissing.

After dinner, when the evening was cool, Mme Rostand often liked to go for a walk. She then took her son's arm and went down to L'Estaque, telling Naïs to bring her shawl as a measure of precaution. They went all three of them to see the sardine fishers come in. Out at sea the lanterns danced, and soon the dark silhouettes of the boats could be discerned nearing the beach amid a muffled sound of oars. On good days joyous voices would ring out, and the women would hurry down, laden with baskets, while the three men who manned each boat set to work to empty the net, which, as it lay under the thwarts, looked like a broad, dark ribbon dotted with flashes of silver. The sardines, hanging by the gills to the meshes, still struggled and threw out a metallic luster. Then they fell into the baskets like a shower of crown pieces amid the pale light of the lanterns. Mme Rostand would often leave her son's arm to talk to the fishermen standing near a boat, interested by the sight, while Frédéric, standing at Naïs's side, outside the radius of light, clasped the girl's hands in a burst of passion. Meanwhile old Micoulin preserved stubborn silence. He went out fishing and came home to do a day's work, with ever the same deep look on his face. But at last his little gray eyes assumed an uneasy expression. He threw side glances at Naïs without saying a word. She seemed to him changed; there was something about her that he could not quite understand. One day she ventured to argue with him, and he thereupon gave her a blow which cut her lip.

That evening when Frédéric saw her mouth swollen he questioned her anxiously.

"It's nothing; only a blow my father gave me," she said.

Her tone was gloomy. And as the young man became angry and declared that he would see into it, "No, never mind," she said; "it's my business. There'll soon be an end to it."

She never told him of the beatings which she received. Only on the days when her father had treated her cruelly she kissed her lover with more ardor, as if to avenge herself on the old man.

Naïs had at first taken the most minute precautions in going to meet Frédéric, but at last rashness seized hold of her. Then, imagining from her father's manner that he suspected something, her prudence returned. She missed two appointments, as her mother told her that Micoulin did not sleep at night but got up and went about from one door to another. However, on the third day, seeing Frédéric's distress, the girl once more forgot all prudence. She went out at about eleven o'clock, resolving that she would not remain more than an hour absent, and she was in hopes that her father, being in his first sleep, would not hear her.

Frédéric was waiting for her under the olive trees. Without telling her fears she refused to go farther. They sat down in their usual place, looking at the sea and the glow of Marseilles. The Planier light was beaming. As Naïs watched it she fell asleep on Frédéric's shoulder. He did not move and, gradually yielding to fatigue himself, his own eyes closed.

No sound, only the chirrup of the grasshopper. The sea slept like the lovers. But suddenly a dark form came forth from the gloom and approached them. It was Micoulin who, awakened by the creaking of a window, had missed Naïs from her room. He had left the house, taking a small hatchet with him. When he saw a dark mass under the olive tree he grasped the handle of the implement. But the children did not stir; he was able to walk up to them, bend down and look in their faces. A slight exclamation escaped him as he recognized his young master. No, no, he could not kill him thus; the blood spilled on the ground would leave traces behind it and would cost him too dear. A peasant does not openly murder his master, for the master, even when he lies under the ground, is always the stronger. As Micoulin stood there, however, a look of savage determination came over his tanned face. At last he shook his head and went off stealthily, leaving the lovers asleep.

When Naïs returned to her room shortly before daybreak, much alarmed at having stayed away so long, she found her window just as she had left it. At breakfast Micoulin calmly watched her eat her bread. She felt safe; her father certainly knew nothing.

CHAPTER IV

PICNICKING

"AREN'T YOU coming out fishing any more, Monsieur Frédéric?" asked Micoulin one evening.

Mme Rostand was sitting on the terrace in the shade of the pines, em-

broidering a handkerchief, while her son, lying at her feet, was amusing himself by throwing pebbles.

"Not I," replied the young man. "I'm getting lazy."

"You are wrong," continued Micoulin. "The traps were full of fish yesterday. You can catch as many as you like just now. You'd like it. Come with me tomorrow morning."

He said this so good-humoredly that Frédéric, who thought of Naïs and did not want to fall out with the father, finally exclaimed: "Very well then. But you'll have to call me. I shall still be sound asleep at five o'clock."

Mme Rostand, feeling rather uneasy, had ceased working.

"Mind you be careful," she said. "I am always anxious when you are on the water."

Next morning Micoulin shouted to Frédéric in vain; the young man's window remained closed. Upon this he said to his daughter, with a savage irony which she did not detect: "You go. He'll hear you, perhaps."

Thus it was Naïs who woke Frédéric that morning. Ten minutes later the young man appeared, clad from head to foot in gray canvas. Old Micoulin was sitting on the parapet of the terrace, patiently waiting for him.

"It's cool; you'd better take a wrapper," he said.

Naïs went to fetch one, and afterward the two men descended the steep steps which led to the sea, while the girl, standing above, followed them with her eyes. At the bottom old Micoulin raised his head and looked at Naïs; there were deep creases at the corners of his mouth.

For the last five days the northeast wind, the mistral, had been blowing. On the previous day it had fallen at evening, but when the sun rose it returned, at first rather gently. At that early hour the sea, lashed by the sudden gusts, was of a deep mottled blue, and the white-crested waves, illumined by the first slanting rays, chased one another over the bosom of the deep. The sky was almost white and clear as crystal. In the distance Marseilles stood out with a distinctness which enabled one to count the windows in the fronts of the houses, while the rocks in the gulf were bathed in a delicate rosy haze.

"We shall have our work cut out to get back again," said Frédéric.

"Very likely," replied Micoulin.

He plied his oars silently, without turning his head. The young man looked for a moment at his bent back, noting his sunburned neck and red ears, from which little rings of gold were hanging. Then he leaned over the side of the boat, gazing into the depths. The sea became rougher, and big shadowy weeds floated by, looking like tufts of some drowned man's hair. This saddened and even alarmed Frédéric a little.

"I say, Micoulin," he remarked after a long silence, "the wind's getting stronger. Be careful; you know that I swim like a lump of lead."

"Yes, yes, I know," replied the old man in a dry voice.

Still he continued rowing in mechanical fashion. Then the boat began to pitch; the white foam on the crests of the waves turned into clouds of spray, which flew before the wind. Frédéric did not want to exhibit his alarm, but

he felt very uncomfortable and would have given a great deal to have been on land again. At last he grew angry and exclaimed: "Where the devil have you stuck your traps? Are we bound for Algiers?"

But old Micoulin, without seeming to trouble himself, again replied: "We're all right; we're all right."

All at once he let go the oars, stood up in the boat and looked toward the shore, as if for certain guiding marks; there was still some five minutes' rowing to be accomplished before getting among the cork buoys which showed where the traps were placed. Once there, while Micoulin was drawing up the baskets, he remained for a few seconds with his face turned toward La Blencarde. Frédéric, following the direction of his eyes, distinctly saw a white form under the pines. It was Naïs, still leaning on the parapet.

"How many traps have you?" asked Frédéric.

"Thirty-five, and we mustn't stop here any longer than we can help," said Micoulin.

He laid hold of the buoy nearest to him and drew the first basket in. The depth was enormous; there was no end to the rope. At last the trap appeared with the large stone which had kept it at the bottom, and as soon as it left the water three fish began to leap about like birds in a cage. It seemed as if one could hear the beating of wings. In a second basket there was nothing, but in the third was found a somewhat rare capture—a small lobster, which flourished its tail violently. Frédéric was all attention now, forgetting his fears, leaning over the side of the boat and awaiting the baskets with beating heart. Whenever he heard a sound as of wings he felt like a sportsman who had just brought down his game. One by one, however, the baskets were drawn into the boat, the water, meantime, streaming around, and soon the whole thirty-five were secured. There were at least fifteen pounds of fish—a splendid catch for the Gulf of Marseilles, which from several causes, especially the extremely fine mesh of the nets which were used, had been yielding less and less fish for many years past.

"That's the lot," said Micoulin. "Now we can make for home."

He had carefully arranged his baskets in the stern, but when Frédéric saw him prepare to set the sail he remarked that with such a wind blowing it would be more prudent to row. The old man shrugged his shoulders. He knew what he was about. And before hoisting the sail he cast a last look in the direction of La Blencarde. Naïs's white dress was still there.

Then came the catastrophe, as sudden as a thunderbolt. Afterward, when Frédéric tried to think over what had happened, he remembered that all at once a gust had caught the sail and that all had then overturned. He could not call anything else to mind, save a feeling of intense cold and bitter agony. He owed his life to a miracle; he had fallen on the sail, which kept him afloat. Some fishermen, having seen the accident, hastened to his help and picked him up, as well as old Micoulin, who was already swimming toward the shore.

Mme Rostand was still asleep, and they concealed from her the danger

which her son had incurred. At the foot of the terrace Frédéric and Micoulin, dripping with water, found Naïs, who had witnessed the scene.

"Devil take it!" cried the old man. "We'd taken up the traps and were coming home. Bad luck to it all!"

Naïs, who was deadly pale, looked fixedly at her father.

"Yes," she muttered, "it's bad luck. But when you sail in a wind like that you know what to expect."

Micoulin flew into a rage.

"What's that to do with you, lazybones? Can't you see Monsieur Frédéric's shivering? Help me get him indoors."

The young man escaped with a day in bed and told his mother that he had a headache. The next day he found Naïs very dispirited. She refused to meet him out of doors again, though one evening in the passage she kissed him passionately. She never told him of her suspicions, but from that day forward she watched over him. Then at the end of a week her fears began to diminish. Her father went about as usual; he even seemed kinder and beat her less often.

Every year the Rostands used to go to eat a bouillabaisse in a hollow of the rocks on the shore, in the direction of Niolon. Afterward, as partridges abounded among the hills, the gentlemen would organize a shooting party. That year Mme Rostand wanted to take Naïs to wait on them and refused to listen to Micoulin's remarks when the old savage attempted to raise some objection.

They set out early. The morning was a charming one. Lying like a mirror beneath the gleaming sun was the blue expanse of the sea; ripples appeared amid the currents, where the blue was tinged with violet, while in apparently stagnant spots the azure faded away into a milky transparency. You might have imagined the sea to be an immense piece of shot satin, whose changing colors grew more and more indistinct as the limpid horizon was reached. And over that slumbering lake the boat glided very softly.

The narrow beach on which they landed was at the mouth of a gorge, and they settled down on a strip of scorched grass which was to serve as a table.

How enjoyable that picnic was! First of all Micoulin set off alone in the boat to take up the baskets which he had set the day before. By the time he came back Naïs had gathered some thyme and lavender and enough dry wood to make a large fire. That day the old man was to make the bouillabaisse, the classic fish soup, the secret of which the coast fishermen transmit from father to son. And a terrible bouillabaisse it was, with its strong doses of pepper and odor of crushed garlic. The Rostands were greatly interested in the preparation of the savory mess.

"Micoulin," said Mme Rostand, "do you think you will be as successful as last year?"

The old man seemed to be in excellent spirits. First of all he washed the fish in sea water, while Naïs took the large pan out of the boat. Soon all was in progress: the fish at the bottom of the vessel, just covered with some water, with some onion, oil, garlic, a handful of pepper and a tomato; then the whole was placed on the fire, a formidable fire, large enough to roast a

sheep. Fishermen say that the goodness of bouillabaisse lies in the cooking: the pan must disappear amid the flames. Micoulin gravely cut some slices of bread into a salad bowl, and at the end of half an hour he poured the liquor on the slices, serving up the fish separately.

"Come along," he said. "It's not good unless it's hot."

Then the bouillabaisse was devoured with the usual jokes.

"I say, Micoulin, did you put any gunpowder in it?"

"It's very good, but it wants a throat of brass to swallow it."

Micoulin devoured his share tranquilly, swallowing a slice of bread at each mouthful and showing at the same time how flattered he felt at eating with his masters.

Having finished, they sat there waiting for the heat of the day to pass off. The glistening rocks covered with ruddy streaks threw grateful shadows around. Clumps of evergreen oaks showed somber foliage, while on the slopes the rows of pines ascended in regular lines, looking like little soldiers on the march. An oppressive silence filled the quivering air.

Mme Rostand had brought the endless embroidery, which was never seen to leave her hands. Naïs, seated at her side, seemed to be interested in the movements of her needle. But her eyes were really on her father. He was lying on his back a few paces away, enjoying a siesta. Then farther still, Frédéric also was sleeping beneath the protecting shade of his broad-brimmed straw hat.

At about four o'clock they awoke, and Micoulin declared that he knew of a covey of partridges at the bottom of a ravine. He had seen them three days previously, so Frédéric allowed himself to be tempted, and they both took their guns.

"Pray be careful," said Mme Rostand. "You might slip and hurt yourself."

"Yes, that does happen sometimes," said Micoulin quietly.

They then went off, and as they disappeared behind the rocks Naïs jumped up and followed them at a distance, muttering: "I'm going to see."

Instead of keeping to the pathway at the bottom of the gorge, she turned to the left among the bushes, hurrying along and avoiding the loose stones for fear of setting them rolling. At length, at a bend of the road, she espied Frédéric walking quickly, slightly bent and ready to lift his gun to his shoulder. As yet she saw nothing of her father, but presently she discovered him on the same slope as herself; he was crouching down, looking toward the gorge, and he seemed to be waiting for something. Twice he raised his gun. Supposing the partridges flew up between the two sportsmen, Micoulin and Frédéric might shoot one another. Naïs, gliding from bush to bush, anxiously took up a position behind the old man.

Some minutes passed. On the other side Frédéric had disappeared in a dip in the ground, but finally he reappeared and remained for an instant motionless. Then Micoulin, still crouching down, took a long aim at the young man. But with a kick Naïs knocked the barrel of his gun upward, and the charge went off in the air with a fearful report which brought down all the echoes of the gorge.

The old man sprang to his feet. On seeing Naïs he seized the gun by its smoking barrel, as if he meant to dash her to the earth with one blow. But the girl stood her ground, her cheeks as white as death, her eyes darting fire. He dared not strike her, and, trembling with rage, he could stammer out in dialect: "I'll kill him; never you fear!"

At the report of the gun the partridges had flown off, Frédéric winging two of them. And about six o'clock the Rostands returned to La Blancarde, old Micoulin rowing with his accustomed air of sullen, stubborn brutishness.

CHAPTER V

THE FINDING OF THE BODY

SEPTEMBER was drawing to an end. After a violent storm the air had become very cool. The days grew shorter, and Naïs refused to meet Frédéric out of doors at nighttime. However, as she reached the house every morning at six o'clock and Mme Rostand did not get up till nine, the lovers still had opportunities for converse.

It was now that Naïs showed the greatest affection for Frédéric. She would take hold of his neck, draw his face toward hers and look into it with a passion which filled her eyes with tears. It was as if she feared that she might never see him more. And she showered kisses upon him as if to protest and swear that she would guard him.

"What is the matter with Naïs?" Mme Rostand would often remark. "She changes every day."

Indeed, she was becoming thinner and quite pale. The fire in her eyes was dying away. She often remained for a long while silent and then would give a start, looking alarmed, like a girl awakening from a bad dream.

"You are ill, my child? You must take care of yourself," repeated her mistress.

But Naïs would smile and answer:

"Oh no, madame, I'm quite well and happy! I've never been so happy."

One morning as she was helping to count the linen, she ventured to ask a question.

"Are you going to stop late at La Blancarde this year?"

"Till the end of October," replied Mme Rostand.

Naïs stood still for a moment with fixed eyes; then she unconsciously said aloud: "Twenty days more."

A continual struggle was going on within her. She wished to keep Frédéric near her, and yet at the same time she was constantly tempted to cry out, "Go!"

He was lost to her; never would that season of love return; she had felt it from their first meeting. One night of gloomy despair she had even gone so far as to wonder whether she ought not to allow her father to kill Frédéric so that he might never love another, but the idea of seeing him dead—he, so

delicate, so fair, more like a girl than herself—was unbearable to her, and the evil thought filled her with horror. No, she would save him, and he should never know of it. He might love her no longer, but she would be happy in the thought that he still lived.

She would often say to him, "Don't go to sea today; the weather will be rough." At other times she pressed him to leave La Blancarde: "You must be sick of being here; you won't love me any longer. Go to town for a few days."

These changes of humor surprised him. He thought her less handsome now that her face had become drawn, and, besides, his was a very fickle temperament. He began to pine for the eau de cologne and the rice powder of the beauties of Aix and Marseilles.

Meantime the old man's words were constantly ringing in Naïs's ears: "I'll kill him; I'll kill him!" In the middle of the night she would wake up, thinking that she had heard shots fired. She became timid and screamed whenever a stone rolled away from under her feet. When Frédéric was out of her sight she was always worrying about him, and what terrified her most was that from morning to night she still seemed to hear Micoulin repeating, "I'll kill him!" The old man, however, preserved stubborn silence; he never made any allusion to what had passed, either by word or gesture; but for her, his every look, his every movement, implied that he would kill his young master at the first opportunity he might have of doing so without being disturbed. And afterward he would deal with Naïs. In the meantime he kicked her about like some disobedient dog.

"Does your father still use you badly?" Frédéric asked the girl one morning.

"Yes," she replied; "he's going mad."

And after showing him her arms, which were black with bruises, she muttered these words, which she often whispered to herself: "It'll soon be over; it'll soon be over."

At the beginning of October she became more gloomy than ever. She was absent-minded, and one could often see her lips move as if she were talking to herself. On several occasions Frédéric perceived her standing on the cliff, seemingly examining the trees around her and measuring the depth of the abyss. A few days later he discovered her with Toine the hunchback, plucking figs on the farthest part of the estate. Toine used to come and help her whenever she had too much to do. He was under the fig tree, and Naïs, who had mounted on a thick branch, was joking with him, calling to him to open his mouth and then throwing down figs which burst upon his face. The poor fellow opened his mouth as he was bidden and closed his eyes in ecstasy, while his huge face expressed complete beatitude. Frédéric was certainly not jealous, but he could not refrain from taking Naïs to task.

"Toine would cut off his hand for us," she said curtly. "We mustn't ill-treat him; he may be useful later on."

The hunchback continued coming to La Blancarde every day. He worked on the cliff, where he was cutting a narrow canal to bring some water to the end of an experimental kitchen garden. Naïs used to go and watch him, and

lively talk would ensue between them. He was so long over the task that old Micoulin finally called him a lazybones and kicked his legs, as he would have done his daughter's.

Rain fell on two successive days. Frédéric, who had to return to Aix the following week, determined that before leaving he would once more go out fishing with Micoulin. And seeing Naïs turn pale he laughed and replied that he should not choose a day when the mistral was blowing. Then as he was to leave so soon, the young girl consented to meet him once more. They met late at night on the terrace. The rain had cleansed the earth, and a strong odor rose from all the freshened vegetation. When that usually parched country is thoroughly soaked all its colors and odors become intensified: the red earth looks like blood; the pines are of an emerald green, the rocks of the whiteness of freshly washed linen. However, that night all that the lovers could detect was the enhanced perfume of the thyme and lavender bushes.

Old associations led them to the olive trees. Frédéric was walking toward one which had sheltered their first love meeting—it stood quite at the edge of the cliff—when Naïs, as if aroused from a reverie, caught hold of his arm, dragged him from the edge and said, trembling, "No, no, not there!"

"Why, what is the matter?" he asked.

She hesitated and finally remarked that after such a fall of rain the cliff was not safe. And she added: "Last winter there was a landslip here."

They sat down farther back under another olive tree. And at last Naïs convulsively burst into tears and would not say why she was crying. Afterward a frigid silence took possession of her, and when Frédéric joked her about her sadness and apathy in his company she murmured:

"No, don't say that. I love you too much. But I'm not in good health, and, besides, it's all over. You're going away."

He vainly tried to comfort her, telling her that he would come again from time to time and that next autumn he would spend two months there. But she shook her head; she knew very well that all was over now.

Their meeting ended in embarrassing silence. They gazed at the sea; Marseilles was glittering with gas lamps, but the Planier lighthouse showed only a solitary, mournful gleam, and gradually the horizon imparted to them some of its own melancholy. At three o'clock, when Frédéric quitted Naïs, kissing her, he felt her shudder.

He could not sleep when he got back into the house; he read till dawn and then, feeling feverish, he took up a position at the window. Just at that moment Micoulin was starting off to take up his traps. As the old man passed along the terrace he raised his head and asked Frédéric if he were coming with him that morning.

"No," replied Frédéric, "I've slept too badly. Tomorrow."

The old fellow went off with a slouching gait. He had to go down to his boat at the foot of the cliff, just under the olive tree where he had surprised his daughter. When he had disappeared Frédéric, on turning his head, was astonished to see Toine already at work; the hunchback was standing near the olive tree with a pickax in his hand, repairing the narrow channel which the

rain had damaged. The air was cool; it was pleasant at the window. Frédéric went to make a cigarette, and as he lounged back to the casement a terrible crash—a roll of thunder, as it seemed—was suddenly heard. He rushed to the window. It was a landslide. He could only distinguish Toine, who was running for his life, flourishing his pickax, amid a cloud of red dust. At the edge of the abyss the old olive tree with its gnarled branches had pitched forward, crashing into the sea. A cloud of spray flew up, while a terrible cry rent the air. Then Frédéric saw Naïs leaning over the parapet, her stiffened hands clutching at the stonework, while her eyes peered into the depths below. There she stood, motionless and expectant, with her hands pressed to the low wall. Still she no doubt divined that somebody was looking at her, for she turned her head, saw Frédéric and cried: "My father! My father!"

An hour afterward they found Micoulin's mutilated body under the stones. Toine, almost crazy, related how he had almost been carried away himself, and everybody declared that it was wrong to carry a stream along the top of the cliff, on account of the infiltrations.

The old wife wept a great deal. As for Naïs, she followed her father to the cemetery with tearless eyes.

On the day after the catastrophe Mme Rostand had insisted upon returning to Aix. Frédéric was very pleased to leave, for the terrible drama had disturbed his peace of mind, and, moreover, in his opinion peasant girls with all their good looks were not equal to their town-bred sisters. He resumed his old mode of life. His mother, touched by his attentiveness to her at La Blancarde, gave him more liberty, so that he passed a very pleasant winter and fondly hoped that his life would always thus glide smoothly away.

M. Rostand had to go to La Blancarde at Easter and wished his son to accompany him, but the young man made various excuses. When the lawyer came back he said the next morning at breakfast: "Oh, by the way, Naïs is going to be married."

"Never!" cried Frédéric in amazement.

"And you'd never guess to whom," continued M. Rostand. "She gave me such good reasons, however."

The fact was Naïs was marrying Toine. In that way nothing would be changed at La Blancarde. Toine would still manage the property, as he had done since Micoulin's death.

The young man listened with an awkward smile. Presently he expressed the opinion that the arrangement was the best one possible for everybody concerned.

"Naïs has grown very old and plain," continued M. Rostand. "I didn't know her again. It is astonishing how quickly girls age on the coast, and she used to be quite pretty too."

"Yes, a feast of sunlight," said Frédéric composedly, and he quietly went on eating his cutlet.

MME NEIGEON

CHAPTER I

LIFE IN PARIS

EIGHT DAYS have gone by since my father, M. de Vaugelade, allowed me to leave Le Boquet, the mournful old château where I was born, in Lower Normandy. My father has strange ideas about the present times; he is a good half century behindhand. However, I am at last living in Paris, which I scarcely knew at all, having simply passed through it on two previous occasions. Fortunately I am not over awkward in my ways. Félix Budin, my old schoolfellow at the College of Caen, pretended, on seeing me here, that I was superb and that the *Parisiennes* would surely dote on me. This made me laugh. But when Félix had left I caught myself standing before a looking glass, contemplating my five feet six inches and smiling at my white teeth and black eyes. Then, however, I shrugged my shoulders, for I'm not conceited.

Yesterday for the first time in my life I spent an evening in a Parisian drawing room. Countess de P—, who is in some degree my aunt, had asked me to dinner. It was her last Saturday. She wanted to introduce me to M. Neigeon, a deputy for our constituency of Gommerville, who had just been appointed undersecretary of state and is on the highroad, so people say, to become a minister. My aunt, who is far more tolerant than my father, plainly declared to me that a young man of my age must not sulk with his country, even if its government were Republican. She wishes to get me an official appointment.

"I will undertake to talk to that obstinate old Vaugelade," she said; "leave everything to me, my dear George."

Precisely at seven o'clock I reached the countess's house. But it seems that people dine very late in Paris. The guests arrived one by one, and some had not yet put in an appearance when half-past seven struck. The countess informed me with an expression of distress that she had been unable to secure M. Neigeon's company; he was retained at Versailles by some parliamentary imbroglio. Nevertheless, she still hoped that he might look in for a moment during the evening. As a stopgap she had invited another deputy of our department, "fat Gaucheraud," as we call him down there. I knew him already, as we had once gone shooting together.

This Gaucheraud is a short, jovial fellow, who has lately let his whiskers grow in the hope of thereby giving himself a serious appearance. He was born in Paris, where his father was a petty solicitor of small means, but down our way he has a rich and very influential uncle, whom he somehow prevailed upon to run him as candidate. I was not aware that he was married, but at table my aunt placed me beside a young fair-haired lady, who looked very pretty and shy and whom fat Gaucheraud called Berthe at the top of his voice.

We were all assembled at last. It was still daylight in the drawing room.

which looks toward the west, when all at once we entered the dining room, which had its curtains drawn and was lit up by a chandelier and several lamps. The change seemed very singular, and as we took our seats some remarks were made about the way in which the last dinners of the winter season are saddened by the lingering twilight. My aunt detested it. And the conversation on the subject was kept up: how mournful, said somebody, did Paris look when you drove across it in the waning light on your way to an invitation. I said nothing myself, but I had not experienced any such impression in my cab, though it had jolted roughly over the paving stones for a half-hour. As a matter of fact, Paris, seen amid the first gleams of the gaslight, had filled me with a passionate desire to partake of all the enjoyment with which it would presently blaze.

By the time the entrees were served, people raised their voices and politics were discussed. I was surprised to hear my aunt expressing political opinions. However, the other ladies were all conversant with state affairs, called prominent men by their names, without any such prefix as "monsieur," and debated and passed judgment on everything and everybody. In front of me Gaucheraud was taking up an enormous amount of room and talking at the top of his voice while steadily eating and drinking. But all those political matters did not interest me; I did not even understand the true sense of many remarks, and so I ended by devoting all my attention to Mme Gaucheraud, Berthe, as I already called her in my own mind for brevity's sake. She was really very pretty. As she sat beside me her ear struck me as being particularly charming: a pretty little rounded ear it was, with light yellowish hair curling around it. She had one of those fair necks, covered behind with little wavy locks which quite upset one. Every now and then, when her shoulders moved, her dress body, which was cut very low, gaped a little, and I noticed a supple, feline undulation about her back. I did not admire her profile so much, as it was rather sharp. She talked politics with even greater eagerness than any of the others.

"Madame, may I pour you out some wine? Shall I pass you the salt, madame?" I asked, striving to be as polite as possible, forestalling her slightest desires and interpreting her every glance and gesture. She had given me a long look as we sat down to table, as if to judge me once and for all.

"Politics bore you, do they not?" she said to me at last. "They plague *me* to death. But then one has to talk about something, and nowadays in society politics are the only thing that people care for."

Then she darted off to another subject.

"Is Gommerville a pretty place?" she asked. "Last summer my husband wanted to take me to see his uncle there, but I felt frightened and pretended that I was ill."

"The country is very fertile," I replied; "there are some beautiful plains."

"Ah, good. Now I know the truth," she resumed with a laugh. "It is a frightful spot, eh? A perfectly flat country with fields following fields and ever the same fringes of poplar trees rising up at intervals."

I wanted to protest, but she had started off again, discussing some proposed

law on secondary education with the guest seated on her right hand, a solemn-looking man with a white beard. At last, however, the conversation turned to theatricals. Whenever she leaned forward to answer a question asked from the other end of the table, the feline undulations of her neck filled me with emotion. At Le Boquet, amid the covert impatience of solitude, I had dreamed of a fair-haired beauty, but she was slow of gesture and had a noble face, and Berthe's mouselike mien and curly hair quite revolutionized my dream. Nevertheless, while the vegetables were being served I glided into some wild fancies. We were alone, she and I, and I kissed her on the neck, and she turned round and smiled at me; whereupon we started together for some very distant land. But the dessert was served, and at that moment she said to me in a whisper, "Pass me that dish of sweetmeats there in front of you."

It seemed to me that there was a caressing softness in her eyes, and the light pressure of her arm on the sleeve of my dress coat gave me a delightful thrill.

"I'm awfully fond of sweetmeats, aren't you?" she resumed as she nibbled at some candied fruit.

Those simple words stirred me to such a degree that I fancied myself in love with her. As I raised my eyes I noticed Gaucheraud, who had been looking at me while I whispered with his wife. He wore his usual gay expression and smiled in an encouraging manner. The idea of the husband smiling calmed me.

But the dinner was drawing to an end. It did not seem to me that a Paris dinner party sparkled with more wit than one at Caen. Berthe alone surprised me. My aunt having complained of the warmth, the company reverted to their first subject of conversation, discussing the spring receptions and finally opining that it was only at wintertime that one really dined well. Then we went off to the little drawing room to take coffee there.

By degrees a great many people arrived. The three drawing rooms and the dining room likewise became crowded. I had sought refuge in a corner, and as my aunt passed near me she said to me hurriedly: "Don't go away yet, George. His wife has arrived. He has promised to fetch her, and I will introduce you."

She was still talking of M. Neigeon, but I scarcely listened. I had heard two young men near me exchanging hasty remarks which filled me with emotion. They were standing on tiptoes at a door of the big drawing room, and at the moment when Félix Budin, my old schoolfellow at Caen, came in and bowed to Mme Gaucheraud, the shorter of the two asked the other: "Are they still on the same terms?"

"Yes," the taller one answered, "more so than ever. It will last till the winter now. I have never known her keep an admirer so long."

This did not cause me any particular pang, but I felt hurt in my self-esteem. Why had she told me in so soft a voice that she was fond of sweetmeats? I certainly had no intention of contending against Félix, yet I ended by persuading myself that those young men had slandered Mme Gaucheraud. I knew my aunt; she was a person of very rigid principles and would not suffer women of doubtful repute in her house. Gaucheraud, as it happened,

had just sprung forward to greet Félix, whom he tapped in a friendly way on the shoulder while eying him affectionately.

"Ah, here you are," said Félix as soon as he discovered me. "I came on your account. Well, will you let me pilot you?"

We remained together in a recess formed by a doorway. I should greatly have liked to question him about Mme Gaucheraud, but I did not know how to do so in an offhand, indifferent way. While seeking a transition I questioned him about a number of other people for whom I cared nothing at all. He named them to me and gave precise particulars about each of them. He was, I should say, a Parisian by birth and had merely spent a couple of years at the college at Caen at the time when his father was prefect of the department of Calvados. I found him very free in his language, and a smile appeared on his lips when I asked him for information about some of the women present.

"Are you looking at Mme Neigeon?" he suddenly asked me.

To tell the truth, I was looking at Mme Gaucheraud. And so somewhat foolishly I answered: "Madame Neigeon—ah, where is she?"

"She's that dark woman yonder, near the chimney piece. She's talking with a fair woman in a low dress."

Near Mme Gaucheraud, indeed, there stood a lady whom I had not previously noticed and who was laughing gaily.

"Ah, so that's Madame Neigeon," I repeated.

Then I examined her. It was a great pity that she was dark, for she struck me as being charming, not quite so tall as Berthe, but with a magnificent crown of black hair. Her eyes were both bright and soft. Her little nose, her finely modeled mouth and her dimpled cheeks indicated a lively and yet thoughtful disposition. Such, at least, was my first impression. But my views became confused as I looked at her, for I soon saw her laughing more loudly and freely than even her friend.

"Do you know Neigeon?" Félix asked me.

"I? Not at all. My aunt is to introduce me to him."

"Oh, he's a nullity, a downright fool," Félix continued. "Political mediocrity in all its perfection—one of those stopgaps that are so useful in parliamentary government. As he does not possess two ideas of his own and every prime minister can, therefore, employ him, he figures in the most contradictory ministerial combinations."

"And his wife?" I asked.

"His wife? Well, you see her. She is charming. If you want to obtain anything from him pay court to his wife."

Félix affected some unwillingness to say anything further. But at last he gave me to understand that Mme Neigeon had made her husband's fortune and continued watching over the home with a view to its prosperity. All Paris attributed lovers to her.

"And the fair lady?" I suddenly inquired.

"The fair lady," Félix answered without the faintest show of feeling, "is Madame Gaucheraud."

"She is a respectable woman, isn't she?"

"Oh, no doubt she's respectable."

Félix assumed a serious demeanor but was unable to preserve it. His smile appeared once more, and I even fancied that I could detect on his features an expression of conceit, which annoyed me. The two women had doubtless noticed that we were occupying ourselves with them, for they forced their laughter. I remained alone, a lady having led Félix away, and I spent the evening comparing Mme Neigeon with Mme Gaucheraud, feeling at once hurt and attracted, failing to understand things aright and experiencing the anxiety of a man who fears lest he may be guilty of some act of foolishness in venturing into a sphere of which he has no knowledge.

"Neigeon hasn't come; what a nuisance he is!" exclaimed my aunt when she again found me in the same corner by the door. "But it's always like that. True, it is barely midnight as yet, and his wife is still waiting for him."

I went round through the dining room and took up a position at the other door of the salon. In this wise I found myself behind the two ladies I have mentioned. Just as I reached the spot I heard Berthe calling her friend Louise. That is a pretty name. Louise was not wearing a low dress. Under her heavy coils of hair I could only see a white strip of neck, but that glimpse of whiteness seemed to me for a moment to be far more fascinating than the exhibition which Berthe was making of her back. Then, however, I no longer knew what to think; they both seemed adorable, and in the perturbed state in which I found myself it appeared to me impossible to choose between them.

But my aunt was looking for me everywhere. It was already one o'clock.

"Have you changed doors?" she said. "Well, he won't come. Every evening that man Neigeon has to save France. At all events, I will introduce you to his wife before she leaves. And mind that you are amiable, for that is important."

Without awaiting my answer the countess placed me in front of Mme Neigeon, giving her my name and briefly acquainting her with my position. I felt rather awkward and could scarcely find a few words. Louise waited with that smile of hers on her face, and then, seeing that I remained embarrassed, she simply bowed. It seemed to me that Mme Gaucheraud was looking at me contemptuously. Both rose, however, and withdrew. In the antechamber, used as a cloakroom, a fit of wild merriment came over them. However, their free-and-easy, bold, masculine ways astonished nobody but me. As they passed the other men drew back and bowed to them with a commingling of extreme politeness and social good-fellowship which stupefied me.

Félix offered me a seat in his cab. But I escaped from him, for I wished to be alone, and I did not hail any driver, for it pleased me to go on foot through the silence and solitude of the streets. I felt feverish, just as one feels at the approach of some severe illness. Was a passion springing up within me? Like the travelers who pay tribute to new climes, I was about to be sorely tried by the atmosphere of Paris.

CHAPTER II

LOUISE

It was only this afternoon that I met those ladies again, this time at the Salon de Peinture, which, it so happened, opened today. I confess that I knew I should meet them there and that it would be very difficult for me to pronounce an opinion on the value of the three or four thousand paintings before which I promenaded for four successive hours. Félix had promised me yesterday that he would call for me about noon; we were to lunch at a restaurant in the Champs Elysées and then repair to the salon.

I have reflected a great deal since the countess's soiree took place, but I must own that reflection has not brought me much enlightenment. How strange a world is Parisian society, at once so polished and so corrupt! I am not a rigid moralist but, nonetheless, I feel embarrassed when I think of the fearful things that I heard men saying to one another in my aunt's drawing room. If one were to believe their muttered comments more than half the women present were disreputable. How was one to tell the truth amid all those assertions? I had at first thought that in spite of all my father had said on the subject my aunt really received a very questionable set. But Félix asserted that things were just the same in most Parisian drawing rooms. Ladies, even the most severely inclined among them, were compelled to show a great deal of tolerance lest they should find their houses forsaken. Then, my first feeling of revolt having calmed down, I simply felt an impulse to snatch at the facile pleasures placed within my reach.

For the last four days I had never awakened in my little flat in the Rue Laffitte without thinking of Louise and Berthe, as I familiarly called them. A singular phenomenon was at work within me; I ended by confounding them together. I was now certain that Félix was Berthe's lover, but this, instead of wounding my feelings, seemed a kind of encouragement, and though my thoughts and plans remained very vague, I was convinced that I had only to choose between Berthe and Louise to become the master of one or the other.

When we entered the first gallery of the fine-art show I was amazed at the great crowd that was stifling there.

"The devil," muttered Félix; "we are rather late. We shall have to use our elbows."

It was a very mixed throng of artists, bourgeois and society people. In the midst of overcoats badly brushed and frock coats black and gloomy, there were many light gowns, those spring Paris gowns which look so gay with their soft silk and their bright trimmings. And I was particularly delighted by the quiet assurance of the women, who cut through the thickest of the throng without even a thought of their trains, whose waves of lace always ended by effecting a passage. In this wise they went from one picture to another as if they were simply crossing their drawing rooms. Only *Parisiennes* can thus retain a goddesslike serenity in a public crush, as if the words they hear and the

contact they have to put up with could not possibly reach and soil them. For a moment I watched one lady, who Félix told me was the Duchesse d'A—. She was accompanied by two daughters of from sixteen to eighteen years of age, and the three of them examined a Leda without so much as blinking, while a party of young painters behind them made merry over the picture with the greatest freedom of language.

But Félix turned into the left-hand galleries, a succession of large square rooms where the crowd was less compact. A white light fell from the glazed roof, a crude light softened by linen hangings. The dust raised by the tramping of the people set, as it were, some slight smoke above the sea of heads. The women needed to be very pretty to bear the effect of that light, that uniform tone, with which the paintings on the four surrounding walls contrasted violently. There one perceived an extraordinary medley of colors—reds, yellows and blues all clashing and running riot amid the bright gold of the picture frames. It was becoming very warm. Some bald-headed gentlemen with polished, glistening craniums puffed as they walked about, hat in hand. Every nose was raised upward. There was quite a crush in front of certain canvases. And one incessantly heard the tramping of feet over the floor boards, accompanied by a vague, endless clamor like the roaring of waves.

"Ah!" Félix suddenly remarked to me. "There's the big affair that folks talks so much about."

People stood, five rows deep, in contemplation before "the big affair." There were ladies with glasses, artists talking spitefully and a tall, lean gentleman taking notes. But I scarcely gave a glance in that direction, for in a neighboring room I had caught sight of two ladies leaning against the handrail and inquisitively examining a little picture on the line. At first there was but a flash of thick black tresses and a mass of fair fluffy hair showing under stylish hats. Then this vision vanished; a wave of the crowd, a sea of heads, hid both ladies from my view. But I could have sworn to them. After taking a few steps I again caught sight now of the fair hair, now of the black tresses, between the ever-moving heads in front of me. I said nothing to Félix; I contented myself with leading him into the next room, maneuvering in such wise that it might seem as if he were the first to recognize the ladies. Had he already noticed them, as I had done? I almost believed so, for he gave me a glance full of delicate irony.

"Ah, what a fortunate meeting!" he exclaimed as he bowed.

The ladies turned and smiled. I awaited the effect of this second interview; it was decisive. Mme Neigeon quite upset me with a mere glance of her black eyes, whereas I seemed to be simply meeting a friend again in the person of Mme Gaucheraud. This time then it was the lightning flash. *She*—Mme Neigeon—was wearing a small yellow hat trimmed with a branch of glycine, and her gown was of mauve silk with trimmings of straw-colored satin, the whole forming a very soft yet showy toilet. However, it was only later that I really scrutinized her. At the first moment she appeared to me in a blaze of light, as if she scattered sunbeams around her.

But Félix was talking. "Nothing remarkable, eh?" he said. "I have seen nothing yet."

"It is the same, *mon Dieu*, as it is every year," Berthe declared.

Then turning toward the wall, she added: "Look at this little painting which Louise discovered. The gown is so beautifully done! Madame de Rochetaillé wore one exactly like it at the ball at the Elysée."

"Yes," murmured Louise, "only the ruches fell squarewise over the *tablier*."

They again studied the little picture, which represented a lady standing before a boudoir mantelpiece, reading a letter. The painting seemed to me very commonplace, but somehow I felt full of sympathy for the painter.

"Why, where is he?" suddenly asked Berthe, as she looked around her. "He loses us at every dozen yards!"

She was speaking of her husband.

"Oh, Gaucheraud is over yonder," quietly exclaimed Félix, who could see everybody. "He is looking at that big Christ in sugar candy, hanging from a gingerbread cross."

In a peaceful, disinterested way the husband, with his hands behind him, was indeed making the rounds of the room on his own account. On catching sight of us he came up to shake hands and said in his jovial fashion: "There's a Crucifixion yonder which shows remarkable religious sentiment. Have you noticed it?"

The ladies, however, were walking on. We followed them with Gaucheraud. His presence authorized us to accompany them. We spoke of M. Neigeon, who would no doubt look in at the show if he could only escape early enough from a committee meeting at which he was to give the government's opinion on a very important question. Gaucheraud, meantime, took possession of me with many expressions of friendship. This embarrassed me, for it was necessary that I should answer him. Félix smiled and gently nudged my elbow, but I failed to understand him. For his part, profiting by the fact that I was keeping the fat man occupied, he walked on in front with the ladies. I only caught snatches of their conversation.

"So you are going to the Variétés this evening?"

"Yes, I have taken a corner box; the piece is said to be amusing. . . . I shall take you, Louise. Oh, I insist on it."

And farther on:

"So now the season is over. The opening of the salon is the final Parisian solemnity."

"But you forget the races!"

"Ah yes, I've an idea of going to the races at Maisons-Laffitte. It's a very pretty place, I'm told."

Meantime Gaucheraud was talking to me about Le Boquet, a superb estate, he said, the value of which had been more than doubled by my father. I could tell that he was bent on flattery. But I barely listened to him. I was stirred to the depths of my being each time that Louise's long train brushed against me as she suddenly stopped before some picture. Under her black hair her white neck looked as delicate as a child's. However, she retained her masculine ways,

which somewhat annoyed me. A great many people bowed to her, and she laughed at them and attracted general attention by her outbursts of gaiety and the quick motions of her skirts. On two occasions she turned around and looked at me fixedly. I walked on as in a dream; I could not say how many hours I followed her in this fashion, dazed by Gaucheraud's chatter and the leagues of paintings which spread out on right and left. I only knew that toward the end we were all chewing dust and that for my own part I felt horribly fatigued, whereas the women bore up and smiled with all bravery.

At six o'clock Félix carried me off to dinner. And at dessert he suddenly exclaimed: "I've got to thank you."

"What for?" I asked him in great surprise.

"Why, for the delicacy you have shown in not paying court to Madame Gaucheraud. So you prefer dark women?"

I could not help flushing, but he hastily added: "Oh, I don't desire your confidence. You must have noticed that I abstained from intervening. In my opinion a man ought to make his apprenticeship in life alone."

He was no longer smiling but wore a serious, friendly air.

"So you think——" I began.

"I think nothing," he answered. "Do as you fancy. You will soon see how things turn out."

I regarded this remark as a piece of encouragement. Félix had reverted to his ironical tone, and lightly, as if jesting, he pretended that Gaucheraud would have liked to see me fall in love with his wife.

"Oh, you don't know the beggar! You didn't understand why he flung himself so eagerly on your neck. The fact is that his uncle's influence is declining in your district, and if he had to face another election he would be heartily glad of your father's support. Well, as you can understand, I felt frightened directly I saw that you might be useful to him, for he has used me up already."

"But that's abominable!" I exclaimed.

"Why abominable?" Félix resumed in so quiet a fashion that I could not tell whether he was in earnest or not. "When a woman is bound to have friends it is just as well that they should prove useful to the home."

On rising from table Félix talked of going to the Variétés. I had seen the piece there two days previously, but I dissembled and expressed a keen desire to become acquainted with it. And what a charming evening we spent. The ladies happened to be in a corner box, quite close to our stalls. On turning my head I could read on Louise's features the pleasure she took in the actors' jests. A couple of evenings previously I had found those jests idiotic. But they no longer offended me; I enjoyed them, since they seemed to foster a kind of complicity between Louise and myself. It was a very broad piece, and it was at the most questionable passages that she laughed the loudest. Whenever our eyes met amid the laughter she refrained from lowering them. I could not help thinking that the piece helped on my interests. Truth to tell, the whole house enjoyed itself; many women in the balcony stalls laughed outright, without even indulging in any fan play by way of hiding their blushes.

We went to pay our respects to the ladies during one of the entr'actes.

Gaucheraud had just gone out, so we were able to sit down. The box was very gloomy, and I could feel Louise near me. Her skirts were spread out, and at a sudden movement she made they quite covered my knees. It was entrancing to be thus near her. That contact seemed to me like a first secret avowal, which bound us one to the other.

CHAPTER III

A BARGAIN

TEN DAYS have now gone by. Félix has disappeared, and I can devise no pretext that might bring me and Mme Neigeon together again. My only resource is to buy five or six daily papers in which I read her husband's name. He intervened lately in a serious debate in the Chamber and delivered a speech about which people are still talking. At any other time that speech would have bored me to death, but nowadays it interests me, because it seems as if I could distinguish Louise's white neck and black tresses behind all the verbose phraseology. I have even had a violent discussion about M. Neigeon—whose incapacity I defended—with a gentleman whom I scarcely know. The malicious attacks of the newspapers quite upset me. That man is an imbecile, no doubt, but then this only proves the superior intelligence of his wife, if indeed it be true, as people say, that she has been the good fairy to whom he owes his fortune.

During these ten days of vain impatience and fruitless rambles I have called quite five times on my aunt, ever in the hope of some piece of good luck, some unforeseen meeting. On the occasion of my last call I managed to displease the countess so seriously that it will be a long time before I shall dare to return to her house. She had taken it into her head to procure me an appointment in the diplomatic service by M. Neigeon's influence, and her stupefaction was intense when I refused the offer on account of my political opinions. The worst was that I accepted it originally, that is, before I had fallen in love with Louise, and had come to the conclusion that I could not decently accept any favors from her husband's hands.

My aunt, who had no notion of the motives of delicacy which actuated me, expressed profound astonishment at what she called my childish capriciousness. Did not many Legitimists, who were quite as scrupulous as myself, represent the republic abroad? she asked. Indeed, diplomacy was the refuge of the Legitimists. They filled the embassies and rendered useful service to the good cause by keeping possession of high positions which the Republicans envied them.

I was, for good reasons, greatly embarrassed as to how I might answer my aunt, and at last I sought a refuge in ridiculous rigidity of principles, whereupon my aunt ended by calling me a fool, for she felt all the more furious since she had already mentioned the affair to M. Neigeon. But no matter! At all events, Louise will never have cause to think that I court her simply in order to secure a berth from the government.

People would laugh at me if I were to relate through what a strange succes-

sion of feelings I have passed during the last ten days. At first I felt convinced that Louise had noticed the emotion with which she inspired me and that it was not displeasing to her. Thus conquest on my part seemed quite possible. But on reflection I began to doubt all this. Surely I must be a fool to think that a woman would throw herself at my head so openly and quickly. Mme Neigeon could have no thought of me. It was quite possible that she had already had lovers, but assuredly any intrigue in which she had engaged had been a far more intricate affair than this. There must be a great distance between such a woman as I had dreamed of, a creature of mere elementary passions and instincts, and an artful *Parisienne*, expert in concealment, such as Louise doubtless was.

Thus she seemed to escape me entirely. I no longer saw her; I no longer knew even if it were indeed true that I had spent five minutes with her in a gloomy box in a theater, feeling her palpitate beside me. And I became very wretched—to such a point, in fact, that for a moment I thought of hurrying back to Le Boquet and shutting myself up there.

But on the day before yesterday there came to me an idea which I was astonished at not having had before. It was to attend a sitting of the Chamber. Perhaps M. Neigeon would speak; perhaps his wife would be there. But it was written that I was not yet to set eyes upon that singular man. Though it had been decided that he should speak, he did not even put in an appearance. It was related that he had been detained by some committee business at the Senate. On the other hand, as I was sitting down in the rear of one of the galleries I experienced keen emotion, for I perceived Mme Gaucheraud in the front row of the gallery facing me. She saw me and looked at me with a smile. Louise, alas, was not with her. My delight fell. On leaving, however, I contrived to meet Mme Gaucheraud in a passage. She displayed a familiar manner. Félix had certainly spoken to her about me.

"Have you been absent from Paris?" she inquired.

I remained speechless, indignant at such a question. Absent? When I had been scouring the city so furiously!

"Well, one meets you nowhere!" she resumed. "The last reception at the Ministry was superb, and the horse show was marvelous."

Then noticing my expression of despair, she began to laugh.

"Well, till tomorrow," she said as she walked away. "We shall see you over yonder, shan't we?"

I answered "Yes" in a stupid fashion, never daring to ask a question for fear that I might again hear her laugh. She had turned around and looked at me with a malicious expression. "Come," she murmured in the discreet tone of a friend who had some pleasant surprise in store for one.

A wild impulse came upon me to run off after her and question her. But she had already turned into another passage, and I bitterly reproached myself with my foolish pride, which had prevented me from acknowledging my ignorance. I was certainly quite ready to go "yonder," but where might "yonder" be? The vagueness of the appointment tortured me, and at the same time I felt ashamed at not knowing what everybody else seemed to know. In the evening

I hastened to Félix' rooms with the view of skillfully extracting from him the information which I needed. But Félix was not at home. Then in my grief I plunged into the perusal of the newspapers, selecting those which gave the most society news and striving to guess, among the announcements for the morrow, what spot *le bon ton* would select as a meeting place. But my perplexity increased, for all sorts of functions were announced: an exhibition of paintings by some of the old masters, a charity bazaar at a big club, a musical mass at Sainte-Clotilde, a general rehearsal, two concerts, the veil taking of an aristocratic novice, without mentioning horse races in all sorts of directions. How could a new arrival in Paris, a provincial conscious of his shortcomings, hope to arrive at the truth amid such confusion? I understood perfectly well that the proper thing was to attend one of those functions, but which one was it? Oh heaven! Finally, at the risk of wandering about all day consumed with vain impatience if I were mistaken, I dared to make a choice. It occurred to me that I had heard the ladies speak of the races at Maisons-Laffitte, and, an inspiration coming to me, I resolved to repair thither. This decision taken, I began to feel calmer.

What a delightful stretch of country is that formed by the environs of Paris! I was not acquainted with Maisons-Laffitte, which charmed me with its houses so gay of aspect, built on a slope which borders the Seine. Now that we have reached the first days of May the apple trees, which are all white, look like big bouquets amid the tender greenery of poplar and elm.

At first, however, I quite lost my bearings between the walls and the quick-set hedges, for I was unwilling to ask anybody the way. On seeing a great many people take the same train I had felt overjoyed, but the ladies were not there, and as I scanned the passers-by in Maisons-Laffitte itself my heart contracted. I was really losing myself alongside the Seine, beyond all the houses, when all at once keen emotion brought me to a standstill near a big tuft of nettles. A group of people, still some fifty yards away, was slowly coming toward me, and I recognized Louise and Berthe. Gaucheraud and Félix, those inseparables, followed them at a distance of a few paces. So I had guessed rightly! This filled me with pride. But my emotion was so great that I behaved like a nincompoop. I hid myself behind the tall clump of nettles, full of a nameless shame, dreading lest I should appear ridiculous. When Louise passed the hem of her skirt brushed against the bushes. However, I at once realized the folly of my first impulse. And so I made all haste to cut across the fields, and as the others reached a bend in the road I came up in the most natural manner possible—like a man, indeed, who, thinking himself alone, is yielding to the dreamy mood inspired by the open air.

"Oh, is it you!" cried Gaucheraud.

I bowed, affecting extreme surprise. We all raised exclamations and shook hands. But Félix laughed in his singular fashion, while Berthe positively winked at me, thereby establishing additional complicity between us. As we walked on I remained for a few seconds with her, behind the others.

"So you have come," she said to me gaily in an undertone.

And without giving me time to answer she began to jest, saying that I was

very happy in still being so young. I felt that I had an ally in her; it seemed to me that she would have been well pleased to help me with her friend. Then as Félix turned round to inquire, "What are you laughing about?" she replied in all tranquillity: "Oh, Monsieur de Vaugelade has been telling me of his journey in the company of a whole family of English tourists."

Gaucheraud, however, had again taken Félix by the arm and was leading him off as if to avoid troubling my tête-à-tête with his wife. I remained between her and Louise and spent a most entrancing hour on the shady road which followed the banks of the Seine. Louise was wearing a light silk gown, and her sunshade with its pink lining steeped her face in a warm, shadowless glow. Here in the country there was more freedom than ever in her demeanor; she talked in a loud voice and looked me full in the face while replying to Berthe, who turned the conversation to rather venturesome subjects with a pertinacity which greatly struck me later on.

"Give Madame Neigeon your arm," she ended by saying to me. "You are certainly not gallant; you can surely see that she is tired."

I offered Louise my arm, and she leaned on it at once. Then Berthe having joined her husband and Félix, we two remained together more than forty paces behind. The road ascended the slope, and we walked very slowly. Down below flowed the Seine between meadows stretching out like carpets of green velvet. There was a long, slender island, too, intersected by two bridges, over which the trains rushed with a noise like distant thunder. Then across the water there was a vast cultivated plain stretching to Mont Valérien, whose gray buildings could be seen amid a dust of sunshine on the very fringe of the sky. But what affected me almost to tears was an odor of springtide spreading all around us as it rose from the herbage on either side of the road.

"Shall you soon go back to Le Boquet?" Louise asked me.

I was foolish enough to answer "No," for I did not foresee that she would add: "Ah, that's annoying, for next week we are going to Les Mûreaux, my husband's property, which is only some two leagues from your place, and my husband meant to ask you to call and see us there."

At this I began to stammer that my father might possibly recall me sooner than I had expected. It had seemed to me that I could feel her arm pressing my own. Was she giving me an assignation then? With the ideas that I had formed of this *Parisienne*, so free and coquettish in her ways, I at once built up a perfect romance: an intrigue in the country, a whole month of passion under the trees. Yes, it was doubtless thus; she found in me the qualities of a young squire and would grant me her love amid suitable surroundings.

"I have to scold you," she suddenly resumed, assuming an affectionate, almost maternal manner.

"How is that?" I murmured.

"Yes, your aunt has spoken to me about you. It seems that you will not accept anything from us. That is very discourteous. Why do you refuse?—tell me."

I blushed again; I was on the point of making a declaration, of exclaiming, "I refuse because I love you." But she made a gesture as if she understood my

intention and wished me to remain silent. And then she added with a laugh: "If you are proud, if you wish to render service for service, we will willingly accept your protection over yonder. You know that a general councilor has to be elected. My husband is a candidate, but he fears defeat, which in our position would be very unpleasant. Will you help us?"

It was impossible to be more charming. That election story seemed to me to be a mere pretext devised by a clever woman to enable us to meet again in the country.

"But certainly I'll help you," I answered.

"And if you succeed in getting my husband returned it is understood that he in his turn will give you a helping hand."

"It is a bargain."

"Yes, a bargain."

She offered me her little hand, and I tapped it, as the custom goes, by way of sealing our agreement. We made merry together. It really seemed to me most delightful. We had passed the last of the trees; the sunlight streamed down on the crest of the hill, and we walked on, silent, amid the great heat. But of course that imbecile Gaucheraud must come to disturb that quivering silence under the flaming sky. He had heard us mention the General Council, and he gave me no more peace but began to tell me all about his uncle and to maneuver for an introduction to my father. At last we reached the race ground. They found the races superb. For my part, I stood all the time behind Louise, looking at her delicate neck. And how delightful was the return homeward after a sudden shower! Beneath the rain the greenery had become softer still; the leaves and the earth sent forth a delightful smell, the very scent of love. Louise half closed her eyes, as if tired and penetrated by all the voluptuousness of springtime.

"Remember our bargain," she said to me at the railway station as she entered her carriage which was waiting there. "At Les Mûreaux in a fortnight's time, eh?"

I pressed the hand she offered, and I fear that I must have been a little rough, as for the first time I saw her become grave, with two little creases as of displeasure about her lips. But Berthe still seemed bent on encouraging me to be bold, and Félix retained his enigmatical smile, while Gaucheraud slapped me on the shoulder, exclaiming, "At Les Mûreaux in a fortnight, Monsieur de Vaugelade. We shall all be there."

The devil take him!

CHAPTER IV

NEWS

I HAVE JUST COME BACK from Les Mûreaux, and such contradictory ideas and impressions fill my mind that it is needful I should recapitulate the day I have spent with Louise in order to arrive at a clear opinion.

Although the estate of Les Mûreaux is only two leagues from Le Boquet, I

knew little of that part of our district. Our own shooting is in the direction of Gommerville, and as a rather long round has to be made to cross the little Béage River, I had not gone there a dozen times in my life. Yet the slope is delightful with its climbing road edged by big walnut trees. Then after reaching the plateau you dip down again, and Les Mûreaux lies at the entry of a dale, whose slopes soon contract into a narrow gorge. The house, a square building of the seventeenth century, is of no great importance, but the grounds are magnificent with their broad lawns and the snatch of forestland at the far end—such a tangle of trees that the very paths are barred by the branches.

When I arrived on horseback two big dogs greeted me with a prolonged barking and jumping. At the end of the avenue I caught sight of a white spot. It was Louise in a light gown and a straw hat. She did not come down to meet me but remained motionless and smiling on the large flight of steps that leads to the hall. It was nine o'clock at the latest.

"Ah, how nice of you!" she called to me. "You, at all events, are an early riser. I am the only one up at the château, as you see."

I complimented her, saying that for a *Parisienne* she was really courageous. But she added with a laugh: "It is true that I have only been here five days. I would get up with the chickens the first mornings. Only as soon as the second week arrives I gradually relapse into my sluggardly ways and end by coming down at ten o'clock, the same as in Paris. This morning, however, I am still a countrywoman."

I had never seen her looking so charming. In her haste to leave her room she had negligently knotted her hair and slipped into the first morning wrap she found. And with her eyes still moist with sleep and her cheeks quite fresh she seemed a young girl again. Some little locks of hair were waving over her neck, and whenever her broad sleeves gaped I could see her bare arms as far as the elbows.

"Do you know where I was going?" she resumed. "Well, I was going to inspect a screen of convolvuli on that arbor yonder. It is marvelous, it seems, when the sun has not yet closed the flowers. The gardener told me of it, and as I missed the sight yesterday I don't want to do so today. You will come with me, won't you?"

I felt a great inclination to offer her my arm, but I understood in time that it would be ridiculous. She ran on like a schoolgirl enjoying a holiday. On reaching the arbor she gave a cry of admiration. From aloft hung quite a drapery of convolvuli, a shower of little bells, pearly with dew, and of delicate hues ranging from vivid rose color to violet and pale blue. The whole suggested one of those phantasies of exquisite grace and strangeness that one finds in Japanese albums.

"This is one's reward when one gets up early," said Louise merrily.

Then she sat down under the arbor, and on seeing that she drew back her skirts to make a little room, I ventured to place myself beside her. I was in a state of keen emotion, for the thought had come to me of bringing matters to a crisis by catching her round the waist and kissing her on the neck. I felt well enough that such roughness was better suited to a young lieutenant dealing

with a housemaid, but I could think of nothing else. I don't know whether Louise understood what was passing in my mind, but though she did not get up her face assumed a very grave expression.

"First of all, shall we talk of our business?" she said.

There was a buzzing in my ears, but I tried to listen to her. It was dim and rather cold in the arbor. Sparks of golden sunshine came in here and there between the foliage of the convolvuli, and on Louise's white wrap they looked like golden flies, golden insects, settling there.

"Well, what is the position?" she asked me with the air of an accomplice.

I thereupon told her of the singular change which I had noticed at my father's. He, who for ten years had never ceased railing at the new state of things and had forbidden me to serve the republic, had now given me to understand, on the very evening of my return, that a young man of my age owed duty to his country. I suspected my aunt of having effected this conversion. Some women must have been set on him. Louise smiled as she listened, and she ended by saying: "I met Monsieur de Vaugelade three days ago at a neighboring château where I was making a call. We had a little conversation."

Then she quickly added: "You know that the election for the General Council will take place next Sunday. You must start on your campaign at once. With your father's help my husband's success will be certain."

"Is Monsieur Neigeon here?" I inquired after some slight hesitation.

"Yes, he arrived last night. But you won't see him this morning, for he has gone off in the direction of Gommerville to take *déjeuner* with a friend, a landowner who has a good deal of influence."

She rose, but I remained seated for yet another moment, deeply regretting that I had not kissed her on the neck, for never should I again find such a dim little nook and such an early propitious hour. It was too late now, and I understood so thoroughly that I should simply make her laugh by falling at her feet on the damp ground that I put off my declaration till a more favorable moment.

Besides, I had just perceived Gaucheraud's bulky silhouette at the end of the path. On seeing Louise and myself come out of the arbor he gave a little sneer. Then he expressed astonishment at our courage in rising so early. For his part, he had only just come down.

"And Berthe?" Louise asked him. "Did she sleep well?"

"Well, I really don't know," he answered; "I haven't seen her yet."

Then noticing my astonishment, he explained that his wife had a headache for the whole day whenever she was disturbed in the morning. And he added that they had long found it most convenient to have separate rooms, one for him and one for her. I must confess that this gave me food for thought. I recalled all manner of stories that I had heard and read of *Parisiennes* in country houses, and when I saw Berthe and my friend Félix come together out of the hall I could not help thinking that my surmises might be true.

I shook hands with Félix, and I can hardly account for it, but by the smile which Louise and Berthe exchanged while Gaucheraud stood by, quietly

whistling, the idea occurred to me that Louise was not ignorant of the matter I have referred to. And more than ever now I regretted not having kissed her while we were in the dim little arbor.

We had *déjeuner* at eleven o'clock. After the meal Gaucheraud took himself off for his siesta. He had unbosomed himself to me, telling me that he feared he might not be successful at the next elections and that he proposed remaining three weeks in the district in the hope of gaining support. Thus after staying with his uncle he had desired to spend a few days at Les Mûreaux in order to show everybody that he was on the best of terms with the Neigeons, for this, in his opinion, might win him a good many votes. I understood that he was also extremely desirous of being invited to my father's. Unfortunately it seemed that I did not care for fair-haired women.

I spent a very gay afternoon with the ladies and Félix. Château life, with Parisian graces frolicking in the open air amid the sunshine of early summer, is really charming. The drawing room spreads out over the lawns. It is no longer the winter drawing room, where you are virtually cooped up, where the women in low dresses ply their fans while the men in black swallowtails stand up alongside the walls. It is a kind of holiday drawing room, with women in light garb scampering freely hither and thither, while the men in their short jackets show themselves amiable and natural: a setting aside, as it were, of society etiquette, a familiarity which banishes the boredom of the stereotyped conversation that one hears at the winter gatherings. Nevertheless, I must confess that the behavior of the ladies still surprised me, reared as I was in the provinces among pious folks. When we took coffee on the terrace after *déjeuner* Louise allowed herself a cigarette, and Berthe talked slang in the most natural manner possible. Later on they took themselves off amid a great rustling of skirts, and one heard them laughing in the distance and calling one another, full of a flightiness which greatly disturbed me. It is foolish to own it, but these manners, so novel to one like myself, made me hope that Louise would give me an early assignation. As for Félix, he quietly went on smoking cigarettes, but at times I caught him looking at me in his almost sarcastic way.

At half-past four I spoke of leaving. But Louise immediately protested: "No, no; you can't go yet. I shall keep you to dinner. My husband will certainly come back, and then you will see him. Really, now, I must introduce you to him."

I explained to her that my father was expecting me. I was compelled to be present at a dinner he was giving at Le Boquet, and with a laugh I continued: "It is an election dinner; I have got to work for you."

"Oh, in that case," she said, "make haste. And if you succeed, you know, come for your reward."

It seemed to me that she blushed as she spoke those words. Did she simply refer to the appointment in the diplomatic service which my father is urging me to accept? I thought I might attribute another meaning to her words, and no doubt I assumed a very conceited air, for all at once, for the second time, I saw her become very grave, with those little creases about the lips which gave her such an expression of proud displeasure.

But I had no time to reflect upon that sudden change of expression. As I was starting a little conveyance drew up before the house steps. I already imagined that the husband had returned. But there were only two children, a little girl about five and a little boy of four, in the vehicle, accompanied by a maid. They stretched out their arms and laughed, and as soon as they could spring to the ground they threw themselves among Louise's skirts. She kissed them on the hair.

"Whose pretty children are these?" I asked.

"Why, mine," she replied with an air of surprise.

Hers! I cannot express in words what a blow that simple answer dealt me. It seemed to me as if she were all at once escaping from me, as if those little beings with puny hands were digging an impassable abyss between her and me. What! She was a mother, and I had known nothing of it! I could not restrain the cry: "So you have children?"

"No doubt," she quietly responded. "They went to see their godmother, two leagues from here, this morning. Allow me to introduce them—Monsieur Lucien, Mademoiselle Marguerite."

The little ones smiled at me. I must have looked very stupid. No, I could not accustom myself to the idea of it. It upset all my notions. I went off with my head in a whirl, and even at this moment I don't know what to think. I see Louise in the arbor draped with convolvuli, and I see her kissing the hair of Lucien and Marguerite. Decidedly those *Parisiennes* are far too intricate for provincials like me. I must get to sleep. I will try to understand things tomorrow.

CHAPTER V

A LESSON

THIS IS THE FINISH of my adventure. Oh, what a lesson! But let me try to relate things calmly.

Last Sunday M. Neigeon was elected as general councilor. After the counting of the votes it became evident that without our support he would have failed. My father, who, for his part, has seen M. Neigeon, gave me to understand that a man of such utter mediocrity was not to be feared. Besides, it was a question of beating a radical candidate. However, after dinner in the evening the old Adam reappeared in my father, and he contented himself with saying to me:

"All that is not very clean business. But everybody repeated to me that I was working for you. Well, do what you think fit. For me the only course left is to take myself off, for I no longer understand things."

On the Monday and Tuesday I hesitated about going to Les Mûreaux. It seemed to me that it would be bad taste to go in search of thanks so quickly. The thought of the children no longer inconvenienced me. I had persuaded myself that there was very little motherliness about Louise. Besides, did not people say in our part of the country that the *Parisiennes* never allowed chil-

dren to interfere with their amusements but handed them over to the care of servants, so as to enjoy perfect liberty themselves? So yesterday, Wednesday, all my scruples disappeared. I was consumed with impatience and set off for the battle at eight o'clock in the morning.

My plan was to reach Les Mûreaux as on the first occasion, at an early hour, so as to find Louise alone. But when I dismounted from my horse a servant told me that Madamie had not yet left her room and made no offer to go and warn her of my arrival. So I simply replied that I would wait.

And, indeed, I waited two long hours. I don't know how many times I made the rounds of the flower beds. Every now and again I raised my eyes to the first-floor windows, but the shutters remained closed. Tired, enervated by this long promenade, I ended by sitting down in the bower of convolvuli. The sky was overcast that morning, and the sunshine did not glide in golden dust between the foliage. It was almost night, indeed, amid the verdure. I reflected, resolving that I must risk everything. I was convinced that if I should again hesitate I should lose Louise forever. As soon as I should be alone with her I would take hold of her hands and affect great emotion so as not to frighten her too much, but afterward I would kiss her on the neck, as I had thought of doing on the former occasion. I was for the tenth time perfecting my plan when all at once Louise herself appeared before me.

"Where are you hiding?" she gaily called, looking for me in the dark arbor. "Oh, you are here, are you? I have been hunting for you for the last ten minutes. I must apologize for having kept you waiting."

Somewhat huskily I answered that there was nothing unpleasant in having to wait when one's thoughts were of her.

"I warned you," she replied without paying attention to my silly compliment, "that I'm not a countrywoman for more than the first week. I've now become a Parisian again and can no longer leave my bed."

She had remained at the entrance of the arbor, as if she did not wish to risk herself amid the gloom falling from the foliage.

"Well, aren't you coming?" she ended by asking me. "We have to talk, you know."

"But one is very comfortable here," I said in a quivering voice. "We can talk on this bench."

She again hesitated, just for a second, then bravely replied: "Oh, as you like. It is rather dark here; still we don't need to see our words."

Thereupon she sat down near me. I felt like fainting. So the fateful hour had come! Yet another minute and I should take hold of her hands. She, however, still perfectly at ease, continued chatting in her clear voice, in which there was not the faintest sign of emotion.

"I won't thank you in ready-made phrases," she said. "You have given us good help, without which we should have been beaten."

I was in no condition to interrupt her. I was trembling and exhorting myself to be brave.

"Besides, there is no need of words between us," she resumed. "We concluded a bargain, you know."

She laughed as she said this, and her laugh suddenly emboldened me. I caught hold of her hands, and she did not withdraw them. I could feel them so little and so warm in my own. She surrendered them to me in a friendly, familiar way, while repeating: "Yes, that is so, isn't it? And now it is my turn to carry out my part of the agreement."

Thereupon I suddenly became audacious and rough, drawing her hands toward my lips. The gloom had increased; a cloud must have been passing over us, and the strong scent of all the plant life around us intoxicated me in that nest of foliage. But before my lips could reach her she freed herself with a nervous strength which I should never have suspected and in her turn caught me roughly by the wrists. And she held me like that without any show of anger, her voice remaining calm, though it assumed somewhat of a scolding tone.

"Come, no childishness," she said. "This is what I feared. Will you allow me to give you a lesson while I hold you here in this little corner?"

She showed the smiling severity of a mother reprimanding a boy.

"I understood you from the very first day. You had been told horrors about me, had you not? And so you conceived fancies which I forgive you, for you know nothing of our sphere of society. You landed in Paris with the ideas of this wolfish region, and perhaps you may say that it is in some measure my fault if you made a mistake. I ought to have stopped you, for you would have withdrawn at a word from me. That's true, and I did not speak that word; I let you go on, and you must regard me as an abominable coquette. Do you know, however, why I did not speak that word?"

I began to stammer. The strangeness of the scene paralyzed me with astonishment. She held my wrists yet more tightly and shook me while remaining so close to me that I could feel her breath on my face.

"I did not say it, because I felt interested in you and wished to give you this lesson. Young men fresh to the world form very erroneous and foolish ideas of women. You don't understand as yet, but you will reflect and guess. We women are very much slandered. Perhaps we do all that is needed to bring that about. Only, you see, there are some who are perfectly virtuous even among those who seem to be the wildest and most compromised. All that is a very delicate matter, but, I repeat, you will reflect and end by understanding."

"Let me go," I murmured in confusion.

"No, I will not let you go. Beg my pardon, if you wish me to do so."

In spite of her jesting tone I could feel that she was growing irritated; that tears of anger were rising to her eyes beneath the affront she had received from me. Within me was springing up a feeling of esteem, of genuine respect, for that woman who was at once so charming and so capable. Her amazonian grace in virtuously enduring her husband's imbecility, her blending of coquetry and rigor, her disdain for evil tittle-tattle and her skill in playing a man's part in the household amid seeming flightiness of conduct—all made her a very complex creature and filled me with admiration.

"Pardon!" I humbly said.

She released me. I at once rose to my feet while she remained quietly seated

on the bench, fearing nothing more from the dimness of the disturbing odor of the greenery. And it was in her usual gay voice that she said to me: "Now let us come back to our bargain. As I am very honest; I pay my debts. Here is your appointment as a junior diplomatic secretary. I received it last night."

Then seeing that I hesitated to take the envelope which she held out to me, she exclaimed with just a touch of irony: "Well, it seems to me that you may well be my husband's *obligé* now."

Such was the finish of my first adventure. When we came out of the arbor Félix was on the terrace with Gaucheraud and Berthe. He pursed his lips as he saw me approach, carrying my nomination. He was doubtless aware of everything and thought me a fool. I took him aside and reproached him bitterly for having allowed me to perpetrate such a blunder, but he answered that experience alone can form young men. And when with a gesture I designated Berthe, who was walking in front of us, by way of questioning him also about her, he shrugged his shoulders with a significance which was extremely clear. Matters being like this, I must confess that in spite of everything I do not yet fully understand the strange morality of society in which the most respectable women show such singular complaisance toward others.

But the last blow was to learn from Gaucheraud himself that my father had invited him and his wife to spend three days at Le Boquet. Félix again began to smile as he announced that for his part he was returning to Paris on the morrow.

Thereupon I ran off, pretending that I had positively promised my father that I would be home for *déjeuner*. I was already at the end of the avenue when I perceived a gentleman in a gig. It must have been M. Neigeon. No matter! I prefer having again missed him. It is on Sunday that Gaucheraud and his wife are to arrive at Le Boquet. What a horrid nuisance!

L'ASSOMMOIR

CHAPTER I

GERVAISE

GERVAISE had waited and watched for Lantier until two in the morning. Then chilled and shivering, she turned from the window and threw herself across the bed, where she fell into a feverish doze with her cheeks wet with tears. For the last week when they came out of the *Veau à Deux Têtes*, where they ate, he had sent her off to bed with the children and had not appeared until late into the night and always with a story that he had been looking for work.

This very night, while she was watching for his return, she fancied she saw him enter the ballroom of the *Grand-Balcon*, whose ten windows blazing with lights illuminated, as with a sheet of fire, the black lines of the outer boulevards. She caught a glimpse of Adèle, a pretty brunette who dined at their restaurant and who was walking a few steps behind him, with her hands swinging as if she had just dropped his arm, rather than pass before the bright light of the globes over the door in his company.

When Gervaise awoke about five o'clock, stiff and sore, she burst into wild sobs, for Lantier had not come in. For the first time he had slept out. She sat on the edge of the bed, half shrouded in the canopy of faded chintz that hung from the arrow fastened to the ceiling by a string. Slowly, with her eyes suffused with tears, she looked around this miserable *chambre garnie*, whose furniture consisted of a chestnut bureau of which one drawer was absent, three straw chairs and a greasy table on which was a broken-handled pitcher.

Another bedstead—an iron one—had been brought in for the children. This stood in front of the bureau and filled up two thirds of the room.

A trunk belonging to Gervaise and Lantier stood in the corner wide open, showing its empty sides, while at the bottom a man's old hat lay among soiled shirts and hose. Along the walls and on the backs of the chairs hung a ragged shawl, a pair of muddy pantaloons and a dress or two—all too bad for the old-clothes man to buy. In the middle of the mantel between two mismatched tin candlesticks was a bundle of pawn tickets from the *Mont-de-Piété*. These tickets were of a delicate shade of rose.

The room was the best in the hotel—the first floor looking out on the boulevard.

Meanwhile side by side on the same pillow the two children lay calmly sleeping. Claude, who was eight years old, was breathing calmly and regularly with his little hands outside of the coverings, while Etienne, only four, smiled with one arm under his brother's neck.

When their mother's eyes fell on them she had a new paroxysm of sobs and pressed her handkerchief to her mouth to stifle them. Then with bare feet, not stopping to put on her slippers which had fallen off, she ran to the window out of which she leaned as she had done half the night and inspected the sidewalks as far as she could see.

The hotel was on the Boulevard de la Chapelle, at the left of the Barrière

Poissonniers. It was a two-story building, painted a deep red up to the first floor, and had disjointed weather-stained blinds.

Above a lantern with glass sides was a sign between the two windows:

HÔTEL BONCŒUR

KEPT BY

MARSOULLIER

in large yellow letters, partially obliterated by the dampness. Gervaise, who was prevented by the lantern from seeing as she desired, leaned out still farther, with her handkerchief on her lips. She looked to the right toward the Boulevard de Rochechouart, where groups of butchers stood with their bloody frocks before their establishments, and the fresh breeze brought in whiffs, a strong animal smell—the smell of slaughtered cattle.

She looked to the left, following the ribbonlike avenue, past the Hospital de Lariboisière, then building. Slowly, from one end to the other of the horizon, did she follow the wall, from behind which in the nighttime she had heard strange groans and cries, as if some fell murder were being perpetrated. She looked at it with horror, as if in some dark corner—dark with dampness and filth—she should distinguish Lantier—Lantier lying dead with his throat cut.

When she gazed beyond this gray and interminable wall she saw a great light, a golden mist waving and shimmering with the dawn of a new Parisian day. But it was to the Barrière Poissonniers that her eyes persistently returned, watching dully the uninterrupted flow of men and cattle, wagons and sheep, which came down from Montmartre and from La Chapelle. There were scattered flocks dashed like waves on the sidewalk by some sudden detention and an endless succession of laborers going to their work with their tools over their shoulders and their loaves of bread under their arms.

Suddenly Gervaise thought she distinguished Lantier amid this crowd, and she leaned eagerly forward at the risk of falling from the window. With a fresh pang of disappointment she pressed her handkerchief to her lips to restrain her sobs.

A fresh, youthful voice caused her to turn around.

"Lantier has not come in then?"

"No, Monsieur Coupeau," she answered, trying to smile.

The speaker was a tinsmith who occupied a tiny room at the top of the house. His bag of tools was over his shoulder; he had seen the key in the door and entered with the familiarity of a friend.

"You know," he continued, "that I am working nowadays at the hospital. What a May this is! The air positively stings one this morning."

As he spoke he looked closely at Gervaise; he saw her eyes were red with tears and then, glancing at the bed, discovered that it had not been disturbed. He shook his head and, going toward the couch where the children lay with their rosy cherub faces, he said in a lower voice:

"You think your husband ought to have been with you, madame. But don't

be troubled; he is busy with politics. He went on like a mad man the other day when they were voting for Eugène Sue. Perhaps he passed the night with his friends abusing that reprobate Bonaparte."

"No, no," she murmured with an effort. "You think nothing of that kind. I know where Lantier is only too well. We have our sorrows like the rest of the world!"

Coupeau gave a knowing wink and departed, having offered to bring her some milk if she did not care to go out; she was a good woman, he told her, and might count on him any time when she was in trouble.

As soon as Gervaise was alone she returned to the window.

From the Barrière the lowing of the cattle and the bleating of the sheep still came on the keen, fresh morning air. Among the crowd she recognized the locksmiths by their blue frocks, the masons by their white overalls, the painters by their coats, from under which hung their blouses. This crowd was cheerless. All of neutral tints—grays and blues predominating, with never a dash of color. Occasionally a workman stopped and lighted his pipe, while his companions passed on. There was no laughing, no talking, but they strode on steadily with cadaverous faces toward that Paris which quickly swallowed them up.

At the two corners of La Rue des Poissonniers were two wineshops, where the shutters had just been taken down. Here some of the workmen lingered, crowding into the shop, spitting, coughing and drinking glasses of brandy and water. Gervaise was watching the place on the left of the street, where she thought she had seen Lantier go in, when a stout woman, bareheaded and wearing a large apron, called to her from the pavement,

"You are up early, Madame Lantier!"

Gervaise leaned out.

"Ah, is it you, Madame Boche! Yes, I am up early, for I have much to do today."

"Is that so? Well, things don't get done by themselves, that's sure!"

And a conversation ensued between the window and the sidewalk. Mme Boche was the concierge of the house wherein the restaurant Veau à Deux Têtes occupied the *rez-de-chaussée*.

Many times Gervaise had waited for Lantier in the room of this woman rather than face the men who were eating. The concierge said she had just been round the corner to arouse a lazy fellow who had promised to do some work and then went on to speak of one of her lodgers who had come in the night before with some woman and had made such a noise that every one was disturbed until after three o'clock.

As she gabbled, however, she examined Gervaise with considerable curiosity and seemed, in fact, to have come out under the window for that express purpose.

"Is Monsieur Lantier still asleep?" she asked suddenly.

"Yes, he is asleep," answered Gervaise with flushing cheeks.

Madame saw the tears come to her eyes and, satisfied with her discovery, was turning away when she suddenly stopped and called out:

"You are going to the lavatory this morning, are you not? All right then, I have some things to wash, and I will keep a place for you next to me, and we can have a little talk!"

Then as if moved by sudden compassion, she added:

"Poor child, don't stay at that window any longer. You are purple with cold and will surely make yourself sick!"

But Gervaise did not move. She remained in the same spot for two mortal hours, until the clock struck eight. The shops were now all open. The procession in blouses had long ceased, and only an occasional one hurried along. At the wineshops, however, there was the same crowd of men drinking, spitting and coughing. The workmen in the street had given place to the workwomen. Milliners' apprentices, florists, burnishers, who with thin shawls drawn closely around them came in bands of three or four, talking eagerly, with gay laughs and quick glances. Occasionally one solitary figure was seen, a pale-faced, serious woman, who walked rapidly, neither looking to the right nor to the left.

Then came the clerks, blowing on their fingers to warm them, eating a roll as they walked; young men, lean and tall, with clothing they had outgrown and with eyes heavy with sleep; old men, who moved along with measured steps, occasionally pulling out their watches, but able, from many years' practice, to time their movements almost to a second.

The boulevards at last were comparatively quiet. The inhabitants were sunning themselves. Women with untidy hair and soiled petticoats were nursing their babies in the open air, and an occasional dirty-faced brat fell into the gutter or rolled over with shrieks of pain or joy.

Gervaise felt faint and ill; all hope was gone. It seemed to her that all was over and that Lantier would come no more. She looked from the dingy slaughterhouses, black with their dirt and loathsome odor, on to the new and staring hospital and into the rooms consecrated to disease and death. As yet the windows were not in, and there was nothing to impede her view of the large, empty wards. The sun shone directly in her face and blinded her.

She was sitting on a chair with her arms dropping drearily at her side but not weeping, when Lantier quietly opened the door and walked in.

"You have come!" she cried, ready to throw herself on his neck.

"Yes, I have come," he answered, "and what of it? Don't begin any of your nonsense now!" And he pushed her aside. Then with an angry gesture he tossed his felt hat on the bureau.

He was a small, dark fellow, handsome and well made, with a delicate mustache which he twisted in his fingers mechanically as he spoke. He wore an old coat, buttoned tightly at the waist, and spoke with a strongly marked Provençal accent.

Gervaise had dropped upon her chair again and uttered disjointed phrases of lamentation.

"I have not closed my eyes—I thought you were killed! Where have you been all night? I feel as if I were going mad! Tell me, Auguste, where have you been?"

"Oh, I had business," he answered with an indifferent shrug of his shoulders. "At eight o'clock I had an engagement with that friend, you know, who is thinking of starting a manufactory of hats. I was detained, and I preferred stopping there. But you know I don't like to be watched and catechized. Just let me alone, will you?"

His wife began to sob. Their voices and Lantier's noisy movements as he pushed the chairs about woke the children. They started up, half naked, with tumbled hair, and hearing their mother cry, they followed her example, rending the air with their shrieks.

"Well, this is lovely music!" cried Lantier furiously. "I warn you, if you don't all stop, that out of this door I go, and you won't see me again in a hurry! Will you hold your tongue? Good-by then; I'll go back where I came from."

He snatched up his hat, but Gervaise rushed toward him, crying:

"No! No!"

And she soothed the children and stifled their cries with kisses and laid them tenderly back in their bed, and they were soon happy and merrily playing together. Meanwhile the father, not even taking off his boots, threw himself on the bed with a weary air. His face was white from exhaustion and a sleepless night; he did not close his eyes but looked around the room.

"A nice-looking place, this!" he muttered.

Then examining Gervaise, he said half aloud and half to himself:

"So! You have given up washing yourself, it seems!"

Gervaise was only twenty-two. She was tall and slender with delicate features, already worn by hardships and anxieties. With her hair uncombed and shoes down at the heel, shivering in her white sack, on which was much dust and many stains from the furniture and wall where it had hung, she looked at least ten years older from the hours of suspense and tears she had passed.

Lantier's word startled her from her resignation and timidity.

"Are you not ashamed?" she said with considerable animation. "You know very well that I do all I can. It is not my fault that we came here. I should like to see you with two children in a place where you can't get a drop of hot water. We ought as soon as we reached Paris to have settled ourselves at once in a home; that was what you promised."

"Pshaw," he muttered; "You had as much good as I had out of our savings. You ate the fatted calf with me—and it is not worth while to make a row about it now!"

She did not heed his word but continued:

"There is no need of giving up either. I saw Madame Fauconnier, the laundress in La Rue Neuve. She will take me Monday. If you go in with your friend we shall be afloat again in six months. We must find some kind of a hole where we can live cheaply while we work. That is the thing to do now. Work! Work!"

Lantier turned his face to the wall with a shrug of disgust which enraged his wife, who resumed:

"Yes, I know very well that you don't like to work. You would like to wear

fine clothes and walk about the streets all day. You don't like my looks since you took all my dresses to the pawnbrokers. No, no, Auguste, I did not intend to speak to you about it, but I know very well where you spent the night. I saw you go into the Grand-Balcon with that streetwalker Adèle. You have made a charming choice. She wears fine clothes and is clean. Yes, and she has reason to be, certainly; there is not a man in that restaurant who does not know her far better than an honest girl should be known!"

Lantier leaped from the bed. His eyes were as black as night and his face deadly pale.

"Yes," repeated his wife, "I mean what I say. Madame Boche will not keep her or her sister in the house any longer, because there are always a crowd of men hanging on the staircase."

Lantier lifted both fists, and then conquering a violent desire to beat her, he seized her in his arms, shook her violently and threw her on the bed where the children were. They at once began to cry again while he stood for a moment, and then, with the air of a man who finally takes a resolution in regard to which he has hesitated, he said:

"You do not know what you have done, Gervaise. You are wrong—as you will soon discover."

For a moment the voices of the children filled the room. Their mother, lying on their narrow couch, held them both in her arms and said over and over again in a monotonous voice:

"If you were not here, my poor darlings! If you were not here! If you were not here!"

Lantier was lying flat on his back with his eyes fixed on the ceiling. He was not listening; his attention was concentrated on some fixed idea. He remained in this way for an hour and more, not sleeping, in spite of his evident and intense fatigue. When he turned and, leaning on his elbow, looked about the room again, he found that Gervaise had arranged the chamber and made the children's bed. They were washed and dressed. He watched her as she swept the room and dusted the furniture.

The room was very dreary still, however, with its smoke-stained ceiling and paper discolored by dampness and three chairs and dilapidated bureau, whose greasy surface no dusting could clean. Then while she washed herself and arranged her hair before the small mirror, he seemed to examine her arms and shoulders, as if instituting a comparison between herself and someone else. And he smiled a disdainful little smile.

Gervaise was slightly, very slightly, lame, but her lameness was perceptible only on such days as she was very tired. This morning, so weary was she from the watches of the night, that she could hardly walk without support.

A profound silence reigned in the room; they did not speak to each other. He seemed to be waiting for something. She, adopting an unconcerned air, seemed to be in haste.

She made up a bundle of soiled linen that had been thrown into a corner behind the trunk, and then he spoke:

"What are you doing? Are you going out?"

At first she did not reply. Then when he angrily repeated the question she answered:

"Certainly I am. I am going to wash all these things. The children cannot live in dirt."

He threw two or three handkerchiefs toward her, and after another long silence he said:

"Have you any money?"

She quickly rose to her feet and turned toward him; in her hand she held some of the soiled clothes.

"Money! Where should I get money unless I had stolen it? You know very well that day before yesterday you got three francs on my black skirt. We have breakfasted twice on that, and money goes fast. No, I have no money. I have four sous for the lavatory. I cannot make money like other women we know."

He did not reply to this allusion but rose from the bed and passed in review the ragged garments hung around the room. He ended by taking down the pantaloons and the shawl and, opening the bureau, took out a sack and two chemises. All these he made into a bundle, which he threw at Gervaise.

"Take them," he said, "and make haste back from the pawnbroker's."

"Would you not like me to take the children?" she asked. "Heavens! If pawnbrokers would only make loans on children, what a good thing it would be!"

She went to the Mont-de-Piété, and when she returned a half-hour later she laid a silver five-franc piece on the mantelshelf and placed the ticket with the others between the two candlesticks.

"This is what they gave me," she said coldly. "I wanted six francs, but they would not give them. They always keep on the safe side there, and yet there is always a crowd."

Lantier did not at once take up the money. He had sent her to the Mont-de-Piété that he might not leave her without food or money, but when he caught sight of part of a ham wrapped in paper on the table with half a loaf of bread he slipped the silver piece into his vest pocket.

"I did not dare go to the milk woman," explained Gervaise, "because we owe her for eight days. But I shall be back early. You can get some bread and some chops and have them ready. Don't forget the wine too."

He made no reply. Peace seemed to be made, but when Gervaise went to the trunk to take out some of Lantier's clothing he called out:

"No—let that alone."

"What do you mean?" she said, turning round in surprise. "You can't wear these things again until they are washed! Why shall I not take them?"

And she looked at him with some anxiety. He angrily tore the things from her hands and threw them back into the trunk.

"Confound you!" he muttered. "Will you never learn to obey? When I say a thing I mean it—"

"But why?" she repeated, turning very pale and seized with a terrible suspicion. "You do not need these shirts; you are not going away. Why should I not take them?"

He hesitated a moment, uneasy under the earnest gaze she fixed upon him. "Why? Why? Because," he said, "I am sick of hearing you say that you wash and mend for me. Attend to your own affairs, and I will attend to mine."

She entreated him, defended herself from the charge of ever having complained, but he shut the trunk with a loud bang and then sat down upon it, repeating that he was master at least of his own clothing. Then to escape from her eyes, he threw himself again on the bed, saying he was sleepy and that she made his head ache, and finally slept or pretended to do so.

Gervaise hesitated; she was tempted to give up her plan of going to the lavatory and thought she would sit down to her sewing. But at last she was reassured by Lantier's regular breathing; she took her soap and her ball of bluing and, going to the children, who were playing on the floor with some old corks, she said in a low voice:

"Be very good and keep quiet. Papa is sleeping."

When she left the room there was not a sound except the stifled laughter of the little ones. It was then after ten, and the sun was shining brightly in at the window.

Gervaise, on reaching the boulevard, turned to the left and followed the Rue de la Goutte-d'Or. As she passed Mme Fauconnier's shop she nodded to the woman. The lavatory, whither she went, was in the middle of this street, just where it begins to ascend. Over a large low building towered three enormous reservoirs for water, huge cylinders of zinc strongly made, and in the rear was the drying room, an apartment with a very high ceiling and surrounded by blinds through which the air passed. On the right of the reservoirs a steam engine let off regular puffs of white smoke. Gervaise, habituated apparently to puddles, did not lift her skirts but threaded her way through the part of *eau de Javelle* which encumbered the doorway. She knew the mistress of the establishment, a delicate woman who sat in a cabinet with glass doors, surrounded by soap and bluing and packages of bicarbonate of soda.

As Gervaise passed the desk she asked for her brush and beater, which she had left to be taken care of after her last wash. Then having taken her number, she went in. It was an immense shed, as it were, with a low ceiling—the beams and rafters unconcealed—and lighted by large windows, through which the daylight streamed. A light gray mist or steam pervaded the room, which was filled with a smell of soapsuds and *eau de Javelle* combined. Along the central aisle were tubs on either side, and two rows of women with their arms bare to the shoulders and their skirts tucked up stood showing their colored stockings and stout laced shoes.

They rubbed and pounded furiously, straightening themselves occasionally to utter a sentence and then applying themselves again to their task, with the steam and perspiration pouring down their red faces. There was a constant rush of water from the faucets, a great splashing as the clothes were rinsed and pounding and banging of the beaters, while amid all this noise the steam engine in the corner kept up its regular puffing.

Gervaise went slowly up the aisle, looking to the right and the left. She carried her bundle under her arm and limped more than usual, as she was pushed and jarred by the energy of the women about her.

"Here! This way, my dear," cried Mme Boche, and when the young woman had joined her at the very end where she stood, the concierge, without stopping her furious rubbing, began to talk in a steady fashion.

"Yes, this is your place. I have kept it for you. I have not much to do. Boche is never hard on his linen, and you, too, do not seem to have much. Your package is quite small. We shall finish by noon, and then we can get something to eat. I used to give my clothes to a woman in La Rue Pelat, but bless my heart, she washed and pounded them all away, and I made up my mind to wash myself. It is clear gain, you see, and costs only the soap."

Gervaise opened her bundle and sorted the clothes, laying aside all the colored pieces, and when Mme Boche advised her to try a little soda she shook her head.

"No, no!" she said. "I know all about it!"

"You know?" answered Boche curiously. "You have washed then in your own place before you came here?"

Gervaise, with her sleeves rolled up, showing her pretty, fair arms, was soaping a child's shirt. She rubbed it and turned it, soaped and rubbed it again. Before she answered she took up her beater and began to use it, accenting each phrase or rather punctuating them with her regular blows.

"Yes, yes, washed—I should think I had! Ever since I was ten years old. We went to the riverside, where I came from. It was much nicer than here. I wish you could see it—a pretty corner under the trees by the running water. Do you know Plassans? Near Marseilles?"

"You are a strong one, anyhow!" cried Mme Boche, astonished at the rapidity and strength of the woman. "Your arms are slender, but they are like iron."

The conversation continued until all the linen was well beaten and yet whole! Gervaise then took each piece separately, rinsed it, then rubbed it with soap and brushed it. That is to say, she held the cloth firmly with one hand and with the other moved the short brush from her, pushing along a dirty foam which fell off into the water below.

As she brushed they talked.

"No, we are not married," said Gervaise. "I do not intend to lie about it. Lantier is not so nice that a woman need be very anxious to be his wife. If it were not for the children! I was fourteen and he was eighteen when the first one was born. The other child did not come for four years. I was not happy at home. Papa Macquart, for the merest trifle, would beat me. I might have married, I suppose."

She dried her hands, which were red under the white soapsuds.

"The water is very hard in Paris," she said.

Mme Boche had finished her work long before, but she continued to dabble in the water merely as an excuse to hear this story, which for two

weeks had excited her curiosity. Her mouth was open, and her eyes were shining with satisfaction at having guessed so well.

"Oh yes, just as I knew," she said to herself, "but the little woman talks too much! I was sure, though, there had been a quarrel."

Then aloud:

"He is not good to you then?"

"He was very good to me once," answered Gervaise, "but since we came to Paris he has changed. His mother died last year and left him about seventeen hundred francs. He wished to come to Paris, and as Father Macquart was in the habit of hitting me in the face without any warning, I said I would come, too, which we did, with the two children. I meant to be a fine laundress, and he was to continue with his trade as a hatter. We might have been very happy. But, you see, Lantier is extravagant; he likes expensive things and thinks of his amusement before anything else. He is not good for much, anyhow!

"We arrived at the Hôtel Montmartre. We had dinners and carriages, suppers and theaters, a watch for him, a silk dress for me—for he is not selfish when he has money. You can easily imagine, therefore, at the end of two months we were cleaned out. Then it was that we came to Hôtel Boncœur and that this life began." She checked herself with a strange choking in the throat. Tears gathered in her eyes. She finished brushing her linen.

"I must get my scalding water," she murmured.

But Mme Boche, much annoyed at this sudden interruption to the long-desired confidence, called the boy.

"Charles," she said, "it would be very good of you if you would bring a pail of hot water to Madame Lantier, as she is in a great hurry."

The boy brought a bucketful, and Gervaise paid him a sou. It was a sou for each bucket. She turned the hot water into her tub and soaked her linen once more and rubbed it with her hands while the steam hovered round her blonde head like a cloud.

"Here, take some of this," said the concierge as she emptied into the water that Gervaise was using the remains of a package of bicarbonate of soda. She offered her also some *eau de Javelle*, but the young woman refused. It was only good, she said, for grease spots and wine stains.

"I thought him somewhat dissipated," said Mme Boche, referring to Lantier without naming him.

Gervaise, leaning over her tub and her arms up to the elbows in the soap-suds, nodded in acquiescence.

"Yes," continued the concierge, "I have seen many little things." But she started back as Gervaise turned round with a pale face and quivering lips.

"Oh, I know nothing," she continued. "He likes to laugh—that is all—and those two girls who are with us, you know, Adèle and Virginie, like to laugh, too, so they have their little jokes together, but that is all there is of it, I am sure."

The young woman, with the perspiration standing on her brow and her arms still dripping, looked her full in the face with earnest, inquiring eyes.

Then the concierge became excited and struck her breast, exclaiming:

"I tell you I know nothing whatever, nothing more than I tell you!"

Then she added in a gentle voice, "But he has honest eyes, my dear. He will marry you, child; I promise that he will marry you!"

Gervaise dried her forehead with her damp hand and shook her head. The two women were silent for a moment; around them, too, it was very quiet. The clock struck eleven. Many of the women were seated swinging their feet, drinking their wine and eating their sausages, sandwiched between slices of bread. An occasional economical housewife hurried in with a small bundle under her arm, and a few sounds of the pounder were still heard at intervals; sentences were smothered in the full mouths, or a laugh was uttered, ending in a gurgling sound as the wine was swallowed, while the great machine puffed steadily on. Not one of the women, however, heard it; it was like the very respiration of the lavatory—the eager breath that drove up among the rafters the floating vapor that filled the room.

The heat gradually became intolerable. The sun shone in on the left through the high windows, imparting to the vapor opaline tints—the palest rose and tender blue, fading into soft grays. When the women began to grumble the boy Charles went from one window to the other, drawing down the heavy linen shades. Then he crossed to the other side, the shady side, and opened the blinds. There was a general exclamation of joy—a formidable explosion of gaiety.

All this time Gervaise was going on with her task and had just completed the washing of her colored pieces, which she threw over a trestle to drip; soon small pools of blue water stood on the floor. Then she began to rinse the garments in cold water which ran from a spigot near by.

"You have nearly finished," said Mme Boche. "I am waiting to help you wring them."

"Oh, you are very good! It is not necessary though!" answered the young woman as she swashed the garments through the clear water. "If I had sheets I would not refuse your offer, however."

Nevertheless, she accepted the aid of the concierge. They took up a brown woolen skirt, badly faded, from which poured out a yellow stream as the two women wrung it together.

Suddenly Mme Boche cried out:

"Look! There comes big Virginie! She is actually coming here to wash her rags tied up in a handkerchief."

Gervaise looked up quickly. Virginie was a woman about her own age, larger and taller than herself, a brunette and pretty in spite of the elongated oval of her face. She wore an old black dress with flounces and a red ribbon at her throat. Her hair was carefully arranged and massed in a blue chenille net.

She hesitated a moment in the center aisle and half shut her eyes, as if looking for something or somebody, but when she distinguished Gervaise she went toward her with a haughty, insolent air and supercilious smile and finally established herself only a short distance from her.

"That is a new notion!" muttered Mme Boche in a low voice. "She was never known before to rub out even a pair of cuffs. She is a lazy creature, I do assure you. She never sews the buttons on her boots. She is just like her sister, that minx of an Adèle, who stays away from the shop two days out of three. What is she rubbing now? A skirt, is it? It is dirty enough, I am sure!"

It was clear that Mme Boche wished to please Gervaise. The truth was she often took coffee with Adèle and Virginie when the two sisters were in funds. Gervaise did not reply but worked faster than before. She was now preparing her bluing water in a small tub standing on three legs. She dipped in her pieces, shook them about in the colored water, which was almost a lake in hue, and then, wringing them, she shook them out and threw them lightly over the high wooden bars.

While she did this she kept her back well turned on big Virginie. But she felt that the girl was looking at her, and she heard an occasional derisive sniff. Virginie, in fact, seemed to have come there to provoke her, and when Gervaise turned around the two women fixed their eyes on each other.

"Let her be," murmured Mme Boche. "She is not the one, now I tell you!"

At this moment, as Gervaise was shaking her last piece of linen, she heard laughing and talking at the door of the lavatory.

"Two children are here asking for their mother!" cried Charles.

All the women looked around, and Gervaise recognized Claude and Etienne. As soon as they saw her they ran toward her, splashing through the puddles, their untied shoes half off and Claude, the eldest, dragging his little brother by the hand.

The women as they passed uttered kindly exclamations of pity, for the children were evidently frightened. They clutched their mother's skirts and buried their pretty blond heads.

"Did Papa send you?" asked Gervaise.

But as she stooped to tie Etienne's shoes she saw on Claude's finger the key of her room with its copper tag and number.

"Did you bring the key?" she exclaimed in great surprise. "And why, pray?"

The child looked down on the key hanging on his finger, which he had apparently forgotten. This seemed to remind him of something, and he said in a clear, shrill voice:

"Papa is gone!"

"He went to buy your breakfast, did he not? And he told you to come and look for me here, I suppose?"

Claude looked at his brother and hesitated. Then he exclaimed:

"Papa has gone, I say. He jumped from the bed, put his things in his trunk, and then he carried his trunk downstairs and put it on a carriage. We saw him—he has gone!"

Gervaise was kneeling, tying the boy's shoe. She rose slowly with a very white face and with her hands pressed to either temple, as if she were afraid of her head cracking open. She could say nothing but the same words over and over again:

"Great God! Great God! Great God!"

Mme Boche, in her turn, interrogated the child eagerly, for she was charmed at finding herself an actor, as it were, in this drama.

"Tell us all about it, my dear. He locked the door, did he? And then he told you to bring the key here?" And then, lowering her voice, she whispered in the child's ear:

"Was there a lady in the carriage?" she asked.

The child looked troubled for a moment but speedily began his story again with a triumphant air.

"He jumped off the bed, put his things in the trunk, and he went away."

Then as Mme Boche made no attempt to detain him, he drew his brother to the faucet, where the two amused themselves in making the water run.

Gervaise could not weep. She felt as if she were stifling. She covered her face with her hands and turned toward the wall. A sharp, nervous trembling shook her from head to foot. An occasional sobbing sigh or, rather, gasp escaped from her lips, while she pressed her clenched hands more tightly on her eyes, as if to increase the darkness of the abyss in which she felt herself to have fallen.

"Come! Come, my child!" muttered Mme Boche.

"If you knew! If you only knew all!" answered Gervaise. "Only this very morning he made me carry my shawl and my chemises to the Mont-de-Piété, and that was the money he had for the carriage."

And the tears rushed to her eyes. The recollection of her visit to the pawnbroker's, of her hasty return with the money in her hand, seemed to let loose the sobs that strangled her and was the one drop too much. Tears streamed from her eyes and poured down her face. She did not think of wiping them away.

"Be reasonable, child! Be quiet," whispered Mme Boche. "They are all looking at you. Is it possible you can care so much for any man? You love him still, although such a little while ago you pretended you did not care for him, and you cry as if your heart would break! Oh lord, what fools we women are!"

Then in a maternal tone she added:

"And such a pretty little woman as you are too. But now I may as well tell you the whole, I suppose? Well then, you remember when I was talking to you from the sidewalk and you were at your window? I knew then that it was Lantier who came in with Adèle. I did not see his face, but I knew his coat, and Boche watched and saw him come downstairs this morning. But he was with Adèle, you understand. There is another person who comes to see Virginie twice a week."

She stopped for a moment to take breath and then went on in a lower tone still.

"Take care! She is laughing at you—the heartless little cat! I bet all her washing is a sham. She has seen her sister and Lantier well off and then came here to find out how you would take it."

Gervaise took her hands down from her face and looked around. When she saw Virginie talking and laughing with two or three women a wild tempest

of rage shook her from head to foot. She stooped with her arms extended, as if feeling for something, and moved along slowly for a step or two, then snatched up a bucket of soapsuds and threw it at Virginie.

"You devil! Be off with you!" cried Virginie, starting back. Only her feet were wet.

All the women in the lavatory hurried to the scene of action. They jumped up on the benches, some with a piece of bread in their hands, others with a bit of soap, and a circle of spectators was soon formed.

"Yes, she is a devil!" repeated Virginie. "What has got into the fool?"

Gervaise stood motionless, her face convulsed and lips apart. The other continued:

"She got tired of the country, it seems, but she left one leg behind her, at all events."

The women laughed, and big Virginie, elated at her success, went on in a louder and more triumphant tone:

"Come a little nearer, and I will soon settle you. You had better have remained in the country. It is lucky for you that your dirty soapsuds only went on my feet, for I would have taken you over my knees and given you a good spanking if one drop had gone in my face. What is the matter with her, anyway?" And big Virginie addressed her audience: "Make her tell what I have done to her! Say! Fool, what harm have I ever done to you?"

"You had best not talk so much," answered Gervaise almost inaudibly; "you know very well where my husband was seen yesterday. Now be quiet or harm will come to you. I will strangle you—quick as a wink."

"Her husband, she says! Her husband! The lady's husband! As if a looking thing like that had a husband! Is it my fault if he has deserted her? Does she think I have stolen him? Anyway, he was much too good for her. But tell me, some of you, was his name on his collar? Madame has lost her—husband! She will pay a good reward, I am sure, to anyone who will carry him back!"

The women all laughed. Gervaise, in a low, concentrated voice, repeated:

"You know very well—you know very well! Your sister—yes, I will strangle your sister!"

"Oh yes, I understand," answered Virginie. "Strangle her if you choose. What do I care? And what are you staring at me for? Can't I wash my clothes in peace? Come, I am sick of this stuff. Let me alone!"

Big Virginie turned away, and after five or six angry blows with her beater she began again:

"Yes, it is my sister, and the two adore each other. You should see them bill and coo together. He has left you with these dirty-faced imps, and you left three others behind you with three fathers! It was your dear Lantier who told us all that. Ah, he had had quite enough of you—he said so!"

"Miserable fool!" cried Gervaise, white with anger.

She turned and mechanically looked around on the floor; seeing nothing, however, but the small tub of bluing water, she threw that in Virginie's face.

"She has spoiled my dress!" cried Virginie, whose shoulder and one hand were dyed a deep blue. "You just wait a moment!" she added as she, in her

turn, snatched up a tub and dashed its contents at Gervaise. Then ensued a most formidable battle. The two women ran up and down the room in eager haste, looking for full tubs, which they quickly flung in the faces of each other, and each deluge was heralded and accompanied by a shout.

"Is that enough? Will that cool you off?" cried Gervaise.

And from Virginie:

"Take that! It is good to have a bath once in your life!"

Finally the tubs and pails were all empty, and the two women began to draw water from the faucets. They continued their mutual abuse while the water was running, and presently it was Virginie who received a bucketful in her face. The water ran down her back and over her skirts. She was stunned and bewildered, when suddenly there came another in her left ear, knocking her head nearly off her shoulders; her comb fell and with it her abundant hair.

Gervaise was attacked about her legs. Her shoes were filled with water, and she was drenched above her knees. Presently the two women were deluged from head to foot; their garments stuck to them, and they dripped like umbrellas which had been out in a heavy shower.

"What fun!" said one of the laundresses as she looked on at a safe distance.

The whole lavatory were immensely amused, and the women applauded as if at a theater. The floor was covered an inch deep with water, through which the termagants splashed. Suddenly Virginie discovered a bucket of scalding water standing a little apart; she caught it and threw it upon Gervaise. There was an exclamation of horror from the lookers-on. Gervaise escaped with only one foot slightly burned, but exasperated by the pain, she threw a tub with all her strength at the legs of her opponent. Virginie fell to the ground.

"She has broken her leg!" cried one of the spectators.

"She deserved it," answered another, "for the tall one tried to scald her!"

"She was right, after all, if the blonde had taken away her man!"

Mme Boche rent the air with her exclamations, waving her arms frantically high above her head. She had taken the precaution to place herself behind a rampart of tubs, with Claude and Etienne clinging to her skirts, weeping and sobbing in a paroxysm of terror and keeping up a cry of "Mamma! Mamma!" When she saw Virginie prostrate on the ground she rushed to Gervaise and tried to pull her away.

"Come with me!" she urged. "Do be sensible. You are growing so angry that the Lord only knows what the end of all this will be!"

But Gervaise pushed her aside, and the old woman again took refuge behind the tubs with the children. Virginie made a spring at the throat of her adversary and actually tried to strangle her. Gervaise shook her off and snatched at the long braid hanging from the girl's head and pulled it as if she hoped to wrench it off, and the head with it.

The battle began again, this time silent and wordless and literally tooth and nail. Their extended hands with fingers stiffly crooked, caught wildly at all in their way, scratching and tearing. The red ribbon and the chenille net worn

by the brunette were torn off; the waist of her dress was ripped from throat to belt and showed the white skin on the shoulder.

Gervaise had lost a sleeve, and her chemise was torn to her waist. Strips of clothing lay in every direction. It was Gervaise who was first wounded. Three long scratches from her mouth to her throat bled profusely, and she fought with her eyes shut lest she should be blinded. As yet Virginie showed no wound. Suddenly Gervaise seized one of her earrings—pear-shaped, of yellow glass—she tore it out and brought blood.

"They will kill each other! Separate them," cried several voices.

The women gathered around the combatants; the spectators were divided into two parties—some exciting and encouraging Gervaise and Virginie as if they had been dogs fighting, while others, more timid, trembled, turned away their heads and said they were faint and sick. A general battle threatened to take place, such was the excitement.

Mme Boche called to the boy in charge:

"Charles! Charles! Where on earth can he be?"

Finally she discovered him, calmly looking on with his arms folded. He was a tall youth with a big neck. He was laughing and hugely enjoying the scene. It would be a capital joke, he thought, if the women tore each other's clothes to rags and if they should be compelled to finish their fight in a state of nudity.

"Are you there then?" cried Mme Boche when she saw him. "Come and help us separate them, or you can do it yourself."

"No, thank you," he answered quietly. "I don't propose to have my own eyes scratched out! I am not here for that. Let them alone! It will do them no harm to let a little of their hot blood out!"

Mme Boche declared she would summon the police, but to this the mistress of the lavatory, the delicate-looking woman with weak eyes, strenuously objected.

"No, no, I will not. It would injure my house!" she said over and over again.

Both women lay on the ground. Suddenly Virginie struggled up to her knees. She had got possession of one of the beaters, which she brandished. Her voice was hoarse and low as she muttered:

"This will be as good for you as for your dirty linen!"

Gervaise, in her turn, snatched another beater, which she held like a club. Her voice also was hoarse and low.

"I will beat your skin," she muttered, "as I would my coarse towels."

They knelt in front of each other in utter silence for at least a minute, with hair streaming, eyes glaring and distended nostrils. They each drew a long breath.

Gervaise struck the first blow with her beater full on the shoulders of her adversary and then threw herself over on the side to escape Virginie's weapon, which touched her on the hip.

Thus started, they struck each other as laundresses strike their linen, in measured cadence.

The women about them ceased to laugh; many went away, saying they

were faint. Those who remained watched the scene with a cruel light in their eyes. Mme Boche had taken Claude and Etienne to the other end of the room, whence came the dreary sound of their sobs which were heard through the dull blows of the beaters.

Suddenly Gervaise uttered a shriek. Virginie had struck her just above the elbow on her bare arm, and the flesh began to swell at once. She rushed at Virginie; her face was so terrible that the spectators thought she meant to kill her.

"Enough! Enough!" they cried.

With almost superhuman strength she seized Virginie by the waist, bent her forward with her face to the brick floor and, notwithstanding her struggles, lifted her skirts and showed the white and naked skin. Then she brought her beater down as she had formerly done at Plassans under the trees on the river-side, where her employer had washed the linen of the garrison.

Each blow of the beater fell on the soft flesh with a dull thud, leaving a scarlet mark.

"Oh! Oh!" murmured Charles with his eyes nearly starting from his head.

The women were laughing again by this time, but soon the cry began again of "Enough! Enough!"

Gervaise did not even hear. She seemed entirely absorbed, as if she were fulfilling an appointed task, and she talked with strange, wild gaiety, recalling one of the rhymes of her childhood:

*"Pan! Pan! Margot au lavoir,
Pan! Pan! à coups de battoir;
Pan! Pan! va laver son cœur,
Pan! Pan! tout noir de douleur.*

"Take that for yourself and that for your sister and this for Lantier. And now I shall begin all over again. That is for Lantier—that for your sister—and this for yourself!

*"Pan! Pan! Margot au lavoir!
Pan! Pan! à coups de battoir."*

They tore Virginie from her hands. The tall brunette, weeping and sobbing, scarlet with shame, rushed out of the room, leaving Gervaise mistress of the field, who calmly arranged her dress somewhat and, as her arm was stiff, begged Mme Boche to lift her bundle of linen on her shoulder.

While the old woman obeyed she dilated on her emotions during the scene that had just taken place.

"You ought to go to a doctor and see if something is not broken. I heard a queer sound," she said.

But Gervaise did not seem to hear her and paid no attention either to the women who crowded around her with congratulations. She hastened to the door where her children awaited her.

"Two hours!" said the mistress of the establishment, already installed in her glass cabinet. "Two hours and two sous!"

Gervaise mechanically laid down the two sous, and then, limping painfully under the weight of the wet linen which was slung over her shoulder and dripped as she moved, with her injured arm and bleeding cheek, she went away, dragging after her with her naked arm the still-sobbing and tear-stained Etienne and Claude.

Behind her the lavatory resumed its wonted busy air, a little gayer than usual from the excitement of the morning. The women had eaten their bread and drunk their wine, and they splashed the water and used their beaters with more energy than usual as they recalled the blows dealt by Gervaise. They talked from alley to alley, leaning over their tubs. Words and laughs were lost in the sound of running water. The steam and mist were golden in the sun that came in through holes in the curtain. The odor of soapsuds grew stronger and stronger.

When Gervaise entered the alley which led to the Hôtel Boncœur her tears choked her. It was a long, dark, narrow alley, with a gutter on one side close to the wall, and the loathsome smell brought to her mind the recollection of having passed through there with Lantier a fortnight previous.

And what had that fortnight been? A succession of quarrels and dissensions, the remembrance of which would be forevermore a regret and bitterness.

Her room was empty, filled with the glowing sunlight from the open window. This golden light rendered more apparent the blackened ceiling and the walls with the shabby, dilapidated paper. There was not an article beyond the furniture left in the room, except a woman's fichu that seemed to have caught on a nail near the chimney. The children's bed was pulled out into the center of the room; the bureau drawers were wide open, displaying their emptiness. Lantier had washed and had used the last of the pomade—two cents' worth on the back of a playing card—the dirty water in which he had washed still stood in the basin. He had forgotten nothing; the corner hitherto occupied by his trunk now seemed to Gervaise a vast desert. Even the small mirror was gone. With a presentiment of evil she turned hastily to the chimney. Yes, she was right, Lantier had carried away the tickets. The pink papers were no longer between the candlesticks!

She threw her bundle of linen into a chair and stood looking first at one thing and then at another in a dull agony that no tears came to relieve.

She had but one sou in the world. She heard a merry laugh from her boys who, already consoled, were at the window. She went toward them and, laying a hand on each of their heads, looked out on that scene on which her weary eyes had dwelt so long that same morning.

Yes, it was on that street that she and her children would soon be thrown, and she turned her hopeless, despairing eyes toward the outer boulevards—looking from right to left, lingering at the two extremities, seized by a feeling of terror, as if her life thenceforward was to be spent between a slaughter-house and a hospital.

CHAPTER II

GERVAISE AND COUPEAU

THREE WEEKS LATER, about half-past eleven one fine sunny morning, Gervaise and Coupeau, the tinworker, were eating some brandied fruit at the Assommoir.

Coupeau, who was smoking outside, had seen her as she crossed the street with her linen and compelled her to enter. Her huge basket was on the floor, back of the little table where they sat.

Father Colombe's Tavern, known as the Assommoir, was on the corners of the Rue des Poissonniers and of the Boulevard de Rochechouart. The sign bore the one single word in long, blue letters:

DISTILLATION

And this word stretched from one end to the other. On either side of the door stood tall oleanders in small casks, their leaves covered thick with dust. The enormous counter with its rows of glasses, its fountain and its pewter measures was on the left of the door, and the huge room was ornamented by gigantic casks painted bright yellow and highly varnished, hooped with shining copper. On high shelves were bottles of liquors and jars of fruits; all sorts of flasks standing in order concealed the wall and repeated their pale green or deep crimson tints in the great mirror behind the counter.

The great feature of the house, however, was the distilling apparatus which stood at the back of the room behind an oak railing on which the tipsy workmen leaned as they stupidly watched the still with its long neck and serpentine tubes descending to subterranean regions—a very devil's kitchen.

At this early hour the Assommoir was nearly empty. A stout man in his shirt sleeves—Father Colombe himself—was serving a little girl not more than twelve years old with four cents' worth of liquor in a cup.

The sun streamed in at the door and lay on the floor, which was black where the men had spat as they smoked. And from the counter, from the casks, from all the room, rose an alcoholic emanation which seemed to intoxicate the very particles of dust floating in the sunshine.

In the meantime Coupeau rolled a new cigarette. He was very neat and clean, wearing a blouse and a little blue cloth cap and showing his white teeth as he smiled.

The lower jaw was somewhat prominent and the nose slightly flat; he had fine brown eyes and the face of a happy child and good-natured animal. His hair was thick and curly. His complexion was delicate still, for he was only twenty-six. Opposite him sat Gervaise in a black gown, leaning slightly forward, finishing her fruit, which she held by the stem.

They were near the street, at the first of the four tables arranged in front of the counter. When Coupeau had lighted his cigar he placed both elbows

on the table and looked at the woman without speaking. Her pretty face had that day something of the delicate transparency of fine porcelain.

Then continuing something which they apparently had been previously discussing, he said in a low voice:

"Then you say no, do you? Absolutely no?"

"Of course. No it must be, Monsieur Coupeau," answered Gervaise with a smile. "Surely you do not intend to begin that again here! You promised to be reasonable too. Had I known, I should certainly have refused your treat."

He did not speak but gazed at her more intently than before with tender boldness. He looked at her soft eyes and dewy lips, pale at the corners but half parted, allowing one to see the rich crimson within.

She returned his look with a kind and affectionate smile. Finally she said:

"You should not think of such a thing. It is folly! I am an old woman. I have a boy eight years old. What should we do together?"

"Much as other people do, I suppose!" answered Coupeau with a wink.

She shrugged her shoulders.

"You know nothing about it, Monsieur Coupeau, but I have had some experience. I have two mouths in the house, and they have excellent appetites. How am I to bring up my children if I trifle away my time? Then, too, my misfortune has taught me one great lesson, which is that the less I have to do with men, the better!"

She then proceeded to explain all her reasons, calmly and without anger. It was easy to see that her words were the result of grave consideration.

Coupeau listened quietly, saying only at intervals:

"You are hurting my feelings. Yes, hurting my feelings."

"Yes, I see that," she answered, "and I am really very sorry for you. If I had any idea of leading a different life from that which I follow today it might as well be with you as with another. You have the look of a good-natured man. But what is the use? I have now been with Madame Fauconnier for a fortnight. The children are going to school, and I am very happy, for I have plenty to do. Don't you see, therefore, that it is best for us to remain as we are?"

And she stooped to pick up her basket.

"You are keeping me here to talk," she said, "and they are waiting for me at my employer's. You will find some other woman, Monsieur Coupeau, far prettier than I, who will not have two children to bring up!"

He looked at the clock and made her sit down again.

"Wait!" he cried. "It is still thirty-five minutes of eleven. I have twenty-five minutes still, and don't be afraid of my familiarity, for the table is between us! Do you dislike me so very much that you can't stay and talk with me for five minutes?"

She put down her basket, unwilling to seem disobliging, and they talked for some time in a friendly sort of way. She had breakfasted before she left home, and he had swallowed his soup in the greatest haste and laid in wait for her as she came out. Gervaise, as she listened to him, watched from the windows—between the bottles of brandied fruit—the movement of the crowd in the

street, which at this hour—that of the Parisian breakfast—was unusually lively. Workmen hurried into the baker's and, coming out with a loaf under their arms, they went into the *Veau à Deux Têtes*, three doors higher up, to breakfast at six sous. Next the baker's was a shop where fried potatoes and mussels with parsley were sold. A constant succession of shopgirls carried off paper parcels of fried potatoes and cups filled with mussels, and others bought bunches of radishes. When Gervaise leaned a little more toward the window she saw still another shop, also crowded, from which issued a steady stream of children holding in their hands, wrapped in paper, a breaded cutlet or a sausage, still warm.

A group formed around the door of the *Assommoir*.

"Say, Bibi-la-Grillade," asked a voice, "will you stand a drink all around?"

Five workmen went in, and the same voice said:

"Father Colombe, be honest now. Give us honest glasses, and no nutshells, if you please."

Presently three more workmen entered together, and finally a crowd of blouses passed in between the dusty oleanders.

"You have no business to ask such questions," said Gervaise to Coupeau; "of course I loved him. But after the manner in which he deserted me—"

They were speaking of Lantier. Gervaise had never seen him again; she supposed him to be living with Virginie's sister, with a friend who was about to start a manufactory for hats.

At first she thought of committing suicide, of drowning herself, but she had grown more reasonable and had really begun to trust that things were all for the best. With Lantier she felt sure she never could have done justice to the children, so extravagant were his habits.

He might come, of course, and see Claude and Etienne. She would not show him the door; only so far as she herself was concerned, he had best not lay his finger on her. And she uttered these words in a tone of determination, like a woman whose plan of life is clearly defined, while Coupeau, who was by no means inclined to give her up lightly, teased and questioned her in regard to Lantier with none too much delicacy, it is true, but his teeth were so white and his face so merry that the woman could not take offense.

"Did you beat him?" he asked finally. "Oh, you are none too amiable. You beat people sometimes, I have heard."

She laughed gaily.

Yes, it was true she had whipped that great Virginie. That day she could have strangled someone with a glad heart. And she laughed again, because Coupeau told her that Virginie, in her humiliation, had left the *Quartier*.

Gervaise's face, as she laughed, however, had a certain childish sweetness. She extended her slender, dimpled hands, declaring she would not hurt a fly. All she knew of blows was that she had received a good many in her life. Then she began to talk of Plassans and of her youth. She had never been indiscreet, nor was she fond of men. When she had fallen in with Lantier she was only fourteen, and she regarded him as her husband. Her only fault, she declared, was that she was too amiable and allowed people to impose on her and that

she got fond of people too easily; were she to love another man, she should wish and expect to live quietly and comfortably with him always, without any nonsense.

And when Coupeau slyly asked her if she called her dear children nonsense she gave him a little slap and said that she, of course, was much like other women. But women were not like men, after all; they had their homes to take care of and keep clean; she was like her mother, who had been a slave to her brutal father for more than twenty years!

"My very lameness—" she continued.

"Your lameness?" interrupted Coupeau gallantly. "Why, it is almost nothing. No one would ever notice it!"

She shook her head. She knew very well that it was very evident, and at forty it would be far worse, but she said softly, with a faint smile, "You have a strange taste, to fall in love with a lame woman!"

He, with his elbows on the table, still coaxed and entreated, but she continued to shake her head in the negative. She listened with her eyes fixed on the street, seemingly fascinated by the surging crowd.

The shops were being swept; the last frying pan of potatoes was taken from the stove; the pork merchant washed the plates his customers had used and put his place in order. Groups of mechanics were hurrying out from all the workshops, laughing and pushing each other like so many schoolboys, making a great scuffling on the sidewalk with their hobnailed shoes; while some, with their hands in their pockets, smoked in a meditative fashion, looking up at the sun and winking prodigiously. The sidewalks were crowded and the crowd constantly added to by men who poured from the open door—men in blouses and frocks, old jackets and coats, which showed all their defects in the clear morning light.

The bells of the various manufactories were ringing loudly, but the workmen did not hurry. They deliberately lighted their pipes and then with rounded shoulders slouched along, dragging their feet after them.

Gervaise mechanically watched a group of three, one man much taller than the other two, who seemed to be hesitating as to what they should do next. Finally they came directly to the Assommoir.

"I know them," said Coupeau, "or rather I know the tall one. It is Mes-Bottes, a comrade of mine."

The Assommoir was now crowded with boisterous men. Two glasses rang with the energy with which they brought down their fists on the counter. They stood in rows, with their hands crossed over their stomachs or folded behind their backs, waiting their turn to be served by Father Colombe.

"Hallo!" cried Mes-Bottes, giving Coupeau a rough slap on the shoulders. "How fine you have got to be with your cigarettes and your linen shirt bosom! Who is your friend that pays for all this? I should like to make her acquaintance."

"Don't be so silly!" returned Coupeau angrily.

But the other gave a knowing wink.

"Ah, I understand. 'A word to the wise—'" And he turned round with a

fearful lurch to look at Gervaise, who shuddered and recoiled. The tobacco smoke, the odor of humanity added to this air heavy with alcohol, was oppressive, and she choked a little and coughed.

"Ah, what an awful thing it is to drink!" she said in a whisper to her friend, to whom she then went on to say how years before she had drunk anisette with her mother at Plassans and how it had made her so very sick that ever since that day she had never been able to endure even the smell of liquors.

"You see," she added as she held up her glass, "I have eaten the fruit, but I left the brandy, for it would make me ill."

Coupeau also failed to understand how a man could swallow glasses of brandy and water, one after the other. Brandied fruit, now and again, was not bad. As to absinthe and similar abominations, he never touched them—not he, indeed. His comrades might laugh at him as much as they pleased; he always remained on the other side of the door when they came in to swallow perdition like that.

His father, who was a tinworker like himself, had fallen one day from the roof of No. 25, in La Rue Coquenaud, and this recollection had made him very prudent ever since. As for himself, when he passed through that street and saw the place he would sooner drink the water in the gutter than swallow a drop at the wineshop. He concluded with the sentence:

"You see, in my trade a man needs a clear head and steady legs."

Gervaise had taken up her basket; she had not risen from her chair, however, but held it on her knees with a dreary look in her eyes, as if the words of the young mechanic had awakened in her mind strange thoughts of a possible future.

She answered in a low, hesitating tone, without any apparent connection:

"Heaven knows I am not ambitious. I do not ask for much in this world. My idea would be to live a quiet life and always have enough to eat—a clean place to live in—with a comfortable bed, a table and a chair or two. Yes, I would like to bring my children up in that way and see them good and industrious. I should not like to run the risk of being beaten—no, that would not please me at all!"

She hesitated, as if to find something else to say, and then resumed:

"Yes, and at the end I should wish to die in my bed in my own home!"

She pushed back her chair and rose. Coupeau argued with her vehemently and then gave an uneasy glance at the clock. They did not, however, depart at once. She wished to look at the still and stood for some minutes gazing with curiosity at the great copper machine. The tinworker, who had followed her, explained to her how the thing worked, pointing out with his finger the various parts of the machine, and showed the enormous retort whence fell the clear stream of alcohol. The still, with its intricate and endless coils of wire and pipes, had a dreary aspect. Not a breath escaped from it, and hardly a sound was heard. It was like some night task performed in daylight by a melancholy, silent workman.

In the meantime Mes-Bottes, accompanied by his two comrades, had lounged to the oak railing and leaned there until there was a corner of the counter

free. He laughed a tipsy laugh as he stood with his eyes fixed on the machine.

"By thunder!" he muttered. "That is a jolly little thing!"

He went on to say that it held enough to keep their throats fresh for a week. As for himself, he would like to hold the end of that pipe between his teeth, and he would like to feel that liquor run down his throat in a steady stream until it reached his heels.

The still did its work slowly but surely. There was not a glimmer on its surface—no firelight reflected in its clean-colored sides. The liquor dropped steadily and suggested a persevering stream which would gradually invade the room, spread over the streets and boulevard and finally deluge and inundate Paris itself.

Gervaise shuddered and drew back. She tried to smile, but her lips quivered as she murmured:

"It frightens me—that machine! It makes me feel cold to see that constant drip."

Then returning to the idea which had struck her as the acme of human happiness, she said:

"Say, do you not think that would be very nice? To work and have plenty to eat, to have a little home all to oneself, to bring up children and then die in one's bed?"

"And not be beaten," added Coupeau gaily. "But I will promise never to beat you, Madame Gervaise, if you will agree to what I ask. I will promise also never to drink, because I love you too much! Come now, say yes."

He lowered his voice and spoke with his lips close to her throat, while she, holding her basket in front of her, was making a path through the crowd of men.

But she did not say no or shake her head as she had done. She glanced up at him with a half-tender smile and seemed to rejoice in the assurance he gave that he did not drink.

It was clear that she would have said yes if she had not sworn never to have anything more to do with men.

Finally they reached the door and went out of the place, leaving it crowded to overflowing. The fumes of alcohol and the tipsy voices of the men carousing went out into the street with them.

Mes-Bottes was heard accusing Father Colombe of cheating by not filling his glasses more than half full, and he proposed to his comrades to go in future to another place, where they could do much better and get more for their money.

"Ah," said Gervaise, drawing a long breath when they stood on the sidewalk, "here one can breathe again. Good-by, Monsieur Coupeau, and many thanks for your politeness. I must hasten now!"

She moved on, but he took her hand and held it fast.

"Go a little way with me. It will not be much farther for you. I must stop at my sister's before I go back to the shop."

She yielded to his entreaties, and they walked slowly on together. He told her about his family. His mother, a tailoress, was the housekeeper. Twice

she had been obliged to give up her work on account of trouble with her eyes. She was sixty-two on the third of the last month. He was the youngest child. One of his sisters, Mme Lerat, a widow, thirty-six years old, was a flower maker and lived at Batignolles, in La Rue Des Moines. The other, who was thirty, had married a chainmaker—a man by the name of Lorilleux. It was to their rooms that he was now going. They lived in that great house on the left. He ate his dinner every night with them; it was an economy for them all. But he wanted to tell them now not to expect him that night, as he was invited to dine with a friend.

Gervaise interrupted him suddenly:

"Did I hear your friend call you Cadet-Cassis?"

"Yes. That is a name they have given me, because when they drag me into a wineshop it is cassis I always take. I had as lief be called Cadet-Cassis as Mes-Bottes, any time."

"I do not think Cadet-Cassis so very bad," answered Gervaise, and she asked him about his work. How long should he be employed on the new hospital?

"Oh," he answered, "there was never any lack of work." He had always more than he could do. He should remain in that shop at least a year, for he had yards and yards of gutters to make.

"Do you know," he said, "when I am up there I can see the Hôtel Boncœur. Yesterday you were at the window, and I waved my hand, but you did not see me."

They by this time had turned into La Rue de la Goutte-d'Or. He stopped and looked up.

"There is the house," he said, "and I was born only a few doors farther off. It is an enormous place."

Gervaise looked up and down the façade. It was indeed enormous. The house was of five stories, with fifteen windows on each floor. The blinds were black and with many of the slats broken, which gave an indescribable air of ruin and desolation to the place. Four shops occupied the *rez-de-chaussée*. On the right of the door was a large room, occupied as a cookshop. On the left was a charcoal vender, a thread-and-needle shop and an establishment for the manufacture of umbrellas.

The house appeared all the higher for the reason that on either side were two low buildings, squeezed close to it, and stood square, like a block of granite roughly hewn, against the blue sky. Totally without ornament, the house grimly suggested a prison.

Gervaise looked at the entrance, an immense doorway which rose to the height of the second story and made a deep passage, at the end of which was a large courtyard. In the center of this doorway, which was paved like the street, ran a gutter full of pale rose-colored water.

"Come up," said Coupeau; "they won't eat you."

Gervaise preferred to wait for him in the street, but she consented to go as far as the room of the concierge, which was within the porch, on the left.

When she had reached this place she again looked up.

Within there were six floors, instead of five, and four regular façades sur-

rounded the vast square of the courtyard. The walls were gray, covered with patches of leprous yellow, stained by the dripping from the slate-covered roof. The wall had not even a molding to break its dull uniformity—only the gutters ran across it. The windows had neither shutters nor blinds but showed the panes of glass which were greenish and full of bubbles. Some were open, and from them hung checked mattresses and sheets to air. Lines were stretched in front of others, on which the family wash was hung to dry—men's shirts, women's chemises and children's breeches! There was a look as if the dwellers under that roof found their quarters too small and were oozing out at every crack and aperture.

For the convenience of each façade there was a narrow, high doorway, from which a damp passage led to the rear, where were four staircases with iron railings. These each had one of the first four letters of the alphabet painted at the side.

The *rez-de-chaussée* was divided into enormous workshops and lit by windows black with dust. The forge of a locksmith blazed in one; from another came the sound of a carpenter's plane, while near the doorway a pink stream from a dyeing establishment poured into the gutter. Pools of stagnant water stood in the courtyard, all littered with shavings and fragments of charcoal. A few pale tufts of grass struggled up between the flat stones, and the whole courtyard was lit but dimly.

In the shade near the water faucet three small hens were pecking with the vain hope of finding a worm, and Gervaise looked about her, amazed at the enormous place which seemed like a little world and as interested in the house as if it were a living creature.

"Are you looking for anyone?" asked the concierge, coming to her door considerably puzzled.

But the young woman explained that she was waiting for a friend and then turned back toward the street. As Coupeau still delayed, she returned to the courtyard, finding in it a strange fascination.

The house did not strike her as especially ugly. At some of the windows were plants—a wallflower blooming in a pot—a caged canary, who uttered an occasional warble, and several shaving mirrors caught the light and shone like stars.

A cabinetmaker sang, accompanied by the regular whistling sounds of his plane, while from the locksmith's quarters came a clatter of hammers struck in cadence.

At almost all the open windows the laughing, dirty faces of merry children were seen, and women sat with their calm faces in profile, bending over their work. It was the quiet time—after the morning labors were over and the men were gone to their work and the house was comparatively quiet, disturbed only by the sounds of the various trades. The same refrain repeated hour after hour has a soothing effect, Gervaise thought.

To be sure, the courtyard was a little damp. Were she to live there, she should certainly prefer a room on the sunny side.

She went in several steps and breathed that heavy odor of the homes of

the poor—an odor of old dust, of rancid dirt and grease—but as the acridity of the smells from the dyehouse predominated, she decided it to be far better than the Hôtel Boncœur.

She selected a window—a window in the corner on the left, where there was a small box planted with scarlet beans, whose slender tendrils were beginning to wind round a little arbor of strings.

"I have made you wait too long, I am afraid," said Coupeau, whom she suddenly heard at her side. "They make a great fuss when I do not dine there, and she did not like it today, especially as my sister had bought veal. You are looking at this house," he continued. "Think of it—it is always lit from top to bottom. There are a hundred lodgers in it. If I had any furniture I would have had a room in it long ago. It would be very nice here, wouldn't it?"

"Yes," murmured Gervaise, "very nice indeed. At Plassans there were not so many people in one whole street. Look up at that window on the fifth floor—the window, I mean, where those beans are growing. See how pretty that is!"

He, with his usual recklessness, declared he would hire that room for her, and they would live there together.

She turned away with a laugh and begged him not to talk any more nonsense. The house might stand or fall—they would never have a room in it together.

But Coupeau, all the same, was not reproved when he held her hand longer than was necessary in bidding her farewell when they reached Mme Fauconnier's laundry.

For another month the kindly intercourse between Gervaise and Coupeau continued on much the same footing. He thought her wonderfully courageous, declared she was killing herself with hard work all day and sitting up half the night to sew for the children. She was not like the women he had known; she took life too seriously, by far!

She laughed and defended herself modestly. Unfortunately, she said, she had not always been discreet. She alluded to her first confinement when she was not more than fourteen and to the bottles of anisette she had emptied with her mother, but she had learned much from experience, she said. He was mistaken, however, in thinking she was persevering and strong. She was, on the contrary, very weak and too easily influenced, as she had discovered to her cost. Her dream had always been to live in a respectable way among respectable people, because bad company knocks the life out of a woman. She trembled when she thought of the future and said she was like a sou thrown up in the air, falling, heads up or down, according to chance, on the muddy pavement. All she had seen, the bad example spread before her childish eyes, had given her valuable lessons. But Coupeau laughed at these gloomy notions and brought back her courage by attempting to put his arm around her waist. She slapped his hands, and he cried out that "for a weak woman, she managed to hurt a fellow considerably!"

As for himself, he was always as merry as a grig, and no fool, either. He

parted his hair carefully on one side, wore pretty cravats and patent-leather shoes on Sunday and was as saucy as only a fine Parisian workman can be.

They were of mutual use to each other at the Hôtel Boncœur. Coupeau went for her milk, did many little errands for her and carried home her linen to her customers and often took the children out to walk. Gervaise, to return these courtesies, went up to the tiny room where he slept and in his absence looked over his clothes, sewed on buttons and mended his garments. They grew to be very good and cordial friends. He was to her a constant source of amusement. She listened to the songs he sang and to their slang and nonsense, which as yet had for her much of the charm of novelty. But he began to grow uneasy, and his smiles were less frequent. He asked her whenever they met the same question, "When shall it be?"

She answered invariably with a jest but passed her days in a fire of indelicate allusions, however, which did not bring a flush to her cheek. So long as he was not rough and brutal, she objected to nothing, but one day she was very angry when he, in trying to steal a kiss, tore out a lock of her hair.

About the last of June Coupeau became absolutely morose, and Gervaise was so much disturbed by certain glances he gave her that she fairly barricaded her door at night. Finally one Tuesday evening, when he had sulked from the previous Sunday, he came to her door at eleven in the evening. At first she refused to open it, but his voice was so gentle, so sad even, that she pulled away the barrier she had pushed against the door for her better protection. When he came in she was startled and thought him ill; he was so deadly pale and his eyes were so bright. No, he was not ill, he said, but things could not go on like this; he could not sleep.

"Listen, Madame Gervaise," he exclaimed with tears in his eyes and a strange choking sensation in his throat. "We must be married at once. That is all there is to be said about it."

Gervaise was astonished and very grave.

"Oh, Monsieur Coupeau, I never dreamed of this, as you know very well, and you must not take such a step lightly."

But he continued to insist; he was certainly fully determined. He had come down to her then, without waiting until morning, merely because he needed a good sleep. As soon as she said yes he would leave her. But he would not go until he heard that word.

"I cannot say yes in such a hurry," remonstrated Gervaise. "I do not choose to run the risk of your telling me at some future day that I led you into this. You are making a great mistake, I assure you. Suppose you should not see me for a week—you would forget me entirely. Men sometimes marry for a fancy and in twenty-four hours would gladly take it all back. Sit down here and let us talk a little."

They sat in that dingy room lit only by one candle, which they forgot to snuff, and discussed the expediency of their marriage until after midnight, speaking very low, lest they should disturb the children, who were asleep with their heads on the same pillow.

And Gervaise pointed them out to Coupeau. That was an odd sort of dowry

to carry a man, surely! How could she venture to go to him with such encumbrances? Then, too, she was troubled about another thing. People would laugh at him. Her story was known; her lover had been seen, and there would be no end of talk if she should marry now.

To all these good and excellent reasons Coupeau answered with a shrug of his shoulders. What did he care for talk and gossip? He never meddled with the affairs of others; why should they meddle with his?

Yes, she had children, to be sure, and he would look out for them with her. He had never seen a woman in his life who was so good and so courageous and patient. Besides, that had nothing to do with it! Had she been ugly and lazy, with a dozen dirty children, he would have wanted her and only her.

"Yes," he continued, tapping her on the knee, "you are the woman I want, and none other. You have nothing to say against that, I suppose?"

Gervaise melted by degrees. Her resolution forsook her, and a weakness of her heart and her senses overwhelmed her in the face of this brutal passion. She ventured only a timid objection or two. Her hands lay loosely folded on her knees, while her face was very gentle and sweet.

Through the open window came the soft air of a fair June night; the candle flickered in the wind; from the street came the sobs of a child, the child of a drunken man who was lying just in front of the door in the street. From a long distance the breeze brought the notes of a violin playing at a restaurant for some late marriage festival—a delicate strain it was, too, clear and sweet as musical glasses.

Coupeau, seeing that the young woman had exhausted all her arguments, snatched her hands and drew her toward him. She was in one of those moods which she so much distrusted, when she could refuse no one anything. But the young man did not understand this, and he contented himself with simply holding her hands closely in his.

"You say yes, do you not?" he asked.

"How you tease," she replied. "You wish it—well then, yes. Heaven grant that the day will not come when you will be sorry for it."

He started up, lifting her from her feet, and kissed her loudly. He glanced at the children.

"Hush!" he said. "We must not wake the boys. Good night."

And he went out of the room. Gervaise, trembling from head to foot, sat for a full hour on the side of her bed without undressing. She was profoundly touched and thought Coupeau very honest and very kind. The tipsy man in the street uttered a groan like that of a wild beast, and the notes of the violin had ceased.

The next evening Coupeau urged Gervaise to go with him to call on his sister. But the young woman shrank with ardent fear from this visit to the Lorilleuxs'. She saw perfectly well that her lover stood in dread of these people.

He was in no way dependent on this sister, who was not the eldest either. Mother Coupeau would gladly give her consent, for she had never been known

to contradict her son. In the family, however, the Lorilleuxs were supposed to earn ten francs per day, and this gave them great weight. Coupeau would never venture to marry unless they agreed to accept his wife.

"I have told them about you," he said. "Gervaise—good heavens, what a baby you are! Come there tonight with me; you will find my sister a little stiff, and Lorilleux is none too amiable. The truth is they are much vexed, because, you see, if I marry I shall no longer dine with them—and that is their great economy. But that makes no odds; they won't put you out of doors. Do what I ask, for it is absolutely necessary."

These words frightened Gervaise nearly out of her wits. One Saturday evening, however, she consented. Coupeau came for her at half-past eight. She was all ready, wearing a black dress, a shawl with printed palm leaves in yellow and a white cap with fluted ruffles. She had saved seven francs for the shawl and two francs fifty centimes for the cap; the dress was an old one, cleaned and made over.

"They expect you," said Coupeau as they walked along the street, "and they have become accustomed to the idea of seeing me married. They are really quite amiable tonight. Then, too, if you have never seen a gold chain made you will be much amused in watching it. They have an order for Monday."

"And have they gold in these rooms?" asked Gervaise.

"I should say so! It is on the walls, on the floors—everywhere!"

By this time they had reached the door and had entered the courtyard. The Lorilleuxs lived on the sixth floor—staircase B. Coupeau told her with a laugh to keep tight hold of the iron railing and not let it go.

She looked up, half shutting her eyes, and gasped as she saw the height to which the staircase wound. The last gas burner, higher up, looked like a star trembling in a black sky, while two others on alternate floors cast long, slanting rays down the interminable stairs.

"Aha!" cried the young man as they stopped a moment on the second landing. "I smell onion soup; somebody has evidently been eating onion soup about here, and it smells good too."

It is true. Staircase B, dirty and greasy, both steps and railing with plastering knocked off and showing the laths beneath, was permeated with the smell of cooking. From each landing ran narrow corridors, and on either side were half-open doors painted yellow and black, with finger marks about the lock and handles, and through the open window came the damp, disgusting smell of sinks and sewers mingling with the odor of onions.

Up to the sixth floor came the noises from the *rez-de-chaussée*—the rattling of dishes being washed, the scraping of saucepans, and all that sort of thing. On one floor Gervaise saw through an open door on which were the words DESIGNER AND DRAUGHTSMAN in large letters two men seated at a table covered with a varnished cloth; they were disputing violently amid thick clouds of smoke from their pipes. The second and third floors were the quietest. Here through the open doors came the sound of a cradle rocking, the wail of a baby, a woman's voice, the rattle of a spoon against a cup. On one door

she read a placard, MME GAUDRON, CARDER; on the next, M. MADINIER, MANUFACTURER OF BOXES.

On the fourth there was a great quarrel going on—blows and oaths—which did not prevent the neighbors opposite from playing cards with their door wide open for the benefit of the air. When Gervaise reached the fifth floor she was out of breath. Such innumerable stairs were a novelty to her. These winding railings made her dizzy. One family had taken possession of the landing; the father was washing plates in a small earthen pan near the sink, while the mother was scrubbing the baby before putting it to sleep. Coupeau laughingly bade Gervaise keep up her courage, and at last they reached the top, and she looked around to see whence came the clear, shrill voice which she had heard above all other sounds ever since her foot touched the first stair. It was a little old woman who sang as she worked, and her work was dressing dolls at three cents apiece. Gervaise clung to the railing, all out of breath, and looked down into the depths below—the gas burner now looked like a star at the bottom of a deep well. The smells, the turbulent life of this great house, seemed to rush over her in one tremendous gust. She gasped and turned pale.

"We have not got there yet," said Coupeau; "we have much farther to go." And he turned to the left and then to the right again. The corridor stretched out before them, faintly lit by an occasional gas burner; a succession of doors, like those of a prison or a convent, continued to appear, nearly all wide open, showing the sordid interiors. Finally they reached a corridor that was entirely dark.

"Here we are," said the tinworker. "Isn't it a journey? Look out for three steps. Hold onto the wall."

And Gervaise moved cautiously for ten paces or more. She counted the three steps, and then Coupeau pushed open a door without knocking. A bright light streamed forth. They went in.

It was a long, narrow apartment, almost like a prolongation of the corridor; a woolen curtain, faded and spotted, drawn on one side, divided the room in two.

One compartment, the first, contained a bed pushed under the corner of the mansard roof; a stove, still warm from the cooking of the dinner; two chairs, a table and a wardrobe. To place this last piece of furniture where it stood, between the bed and the door, had necessitated sawing away a portion of the ceiling.

The second compartment was the workshop. At the back, a tiny forge with bellows; on the right, a vice screwed against the wall under an *étagère*, where were iron tools piled up; on the left, in front of the window, was a small table covered with pincers, magnifying glasses, tiny scales and shears—all dirty and greasy.

"We have come!" cried Coupeau, going as far as the woolen curtain.

But he was not answered immediately.

Gervaise, much agitated by the idea that she was entering a place filled with gold, stood behind her friend and did not know whether to speak or retreat.

The bright light which came from a lamp and also from a brazier of charcoal in the forge added to her trouble. She saw Mme Lorilleux, a small, dark woman, agile and strong, drawing with all the vigor of her arms—assisted by a pair of pincers—a thread of black metal, which she passed through the holes of a drawplate held by the vice. Before the desk or table in front of the window sat Lorilleux, as short as his wife, but with broader shoulders. He was managing a tiny pair of pincers and doing some work so delicate that it was almost imperceptible. It was he who first looked up and lifted his head with its scanty yellow hair. His face was the color of old wax, was long and had an expression of physical suffering.

"Ah, it is you, is it? Well! Well! But we are in a hurry, you understand. We have an order to fill. Don't come into the workroom. Remain in the chamber." And he returned to his work; his face was reflected in a ball filled with water, through which the lamp sent on his work a circle of the brightest possible light.

"Find chairs for yourselves," cried Mme Lorilleux. "This is the lady, I suppose. Very well! Very well!"

She rolled up her wire and carried it to the forge, and then she fanned the coals a little to quicken the heat.

Coupeau found two chairs and made Gervaise seat herself near the curtain. The room was so narrow that he could not sit beside her, so he placed his chair a little behind and leaned over her to give her the information he deemed desirable.

Gervaise, astonished by the strange reception given her by these people and uncomfortable under their sidelong glances, had a buzzing in her ears which prevented her from hearing what was said.

She thought the woman very old looking for her thirty years and also extremely untidy, with her hair tumbling over her shoulders and her dirty camisole.

The husband, not more than a year older, seemed to Gervaise really an old man with thin, compressed lips and bowed figure. He was in his shirt sleeves, and his naked feet were thrust into slippers down at the heel.

She was infinitely astonished at the smallness of the atelier, at the blackened walls and at the terrible heat.

Tiny drops bedewed the waxed forehead of Lorilleux himself, while Mme Lorilleux threw off her sack and stood in bare arms and chemise half slipped off.

"And the gold?" asked Gervaise softly.

Her eager eyes searched the corners, hoping to discover amid all the dirt something of the splendor of which she had dreamed.

But Coupeau laughed.

"Gold?" he said. "Look! Here it is—and here—and here again, at your feet."

He pointed in succession to the fine thread with which his sister was busy and at another package of wire hung against the wall near the vice; then falling down on his hands and knees, he gathered up from the floor, on the tip of his moistened finger, several tiny specks which looked like needle points.

Gervaise cried out, "That surely is not gold! That black metal which looks precisely like iron!"

Her lover laughed and explained to her the details of the manufacture in which his brother-in-law was engaged. The wire was furnished them in coils, just as it hung against the wall, and then they were obliged to heat and reheat it half a dozen times during their manipulations, lest it should break. Considerable strength and a vast deal of skill were needed, and his sister had both. He had seen her draw out the gold until it was like a hair. She would never let her husband do it because he always had a cough.

All this time Lorilleux was watching Gervaise stealthily, and after a violent fit of coughing he said with an air as if he were speaking to himself:

"I make columns."

"Yes," said Coupeau in an explanatory voice, "there are four different kinds of chains, and his style is called a column."

Lorilleux uttered a little grunt of satisfaction, all the time at work, with the tiny pincers held between very dirty nails.

"Look here, Cadet-Cassis," he said. "This very morning I made a little calculation. I began my work when I was only twelve years old. How many yards do you think I have made up to this day?"

He lifted his pale face.

"Eight thousand! Do you understand? Eight thousand! Enough to twist around the necks of all the women in this *Quartier*."

Gervaise returned to her chair, entirely disenchanted. She thought it was all very ugly and uninteresting. She smiled in order to gratify the Lorilleuxs, but she was annoyed and troubled at the profound silence they preserved in regard to her marriage, on account of which she had called there that evening. These people treated her as if she were simply a spectator whose curiosity had induced Coupeau to bring her to see their work.

They began to talk; it was about the lodgers in the house. Mme Lorilleux asked her brother if he had not heard those Benard people quarreling as he came upstairs. She said the husband always came home tipsy. Then she spoke of the designer, who was overwhelmed with debts, always smoking and always quarreling. The landlord was going to turn out the Coquets, who owed three quarters now and who would put their furnace out on the landing, which was very dangerous. Mlle Remanjon, as she was going downstairs with a bundle of dolls, was just in time to rescue one of the children from being burned alive.

Gervaise was beginning to find the place unendurable. The heat was suffocating; the door could not be opened, because the slightest draft gave Lorilleux a cold. As they ignored the marriage question utterly, she pulled her lover's sleeve to signify her wish to depart. He understood and was himself annoyed at this affectation of silence.

"We are going," he said coldly. "We do not care to interrupt your work any longer."

He lingered a moment, hoping for a word or an allusion. Suddenly he decided to begin the subject himself.

"We rely on you, Lorilleux. You will be my wife's witness," he said.

The man lifted his head in affected surprise, while his wife stood still in the center of the workshop.

"Are you in earnest?" he murmured, and then continued as if soliloquizing, "It is hard to know when this confounded Cadet-Cassis is in earnest."

"We have no advice to give," interrupted his wife. "It is a foolish notion, this marrying, and it never succeeds. Never—no—never."

She drawled out these last words, examining Gervaise from head to foot as she spoke.

"My brother is free to do as he pleases, of course," she continued. "Of course his family would have liked— But then people always plan, and things turn out so different. Of course it is none of my business. Had he brought me the lowest of the low, I should have said, 'Marry her and let us live in peace!' He was very comfortable with us, nevertheless. He has considerable flesh on his bones and does not look as if he had been starved. His soup was always ready to the minute. Tell me, Lorilleux, don't you think that my brother's friend looks like Thérèse—you know whom I mean—that woman opposite, who died of consumption?"

"She certainly does," answered the chainmaker contemplatively.

"And you have two children, madame? I said to my brother I could not understand how he could marry a woman with two children. You must not be angry if I think of his interests; it is only natural. You do not look very strong. Say, Lorilleux, don't you think that Madame looks delicate?"

This courteous pair made no allusion to her lameness, but Gervaise felt it to be in their minds. She sat stiff and still before them, her thin shawl with its yellow palm leaves wrapped closely about her, and answered in monosyllables, as if before her judges. Coupeau, realizing her sufferings, cried out: "This is all nonsense you are talking! What I want to know is if the day will suit you, July twenty-ninth."

"One day is the same as another to us," answered his sister severely. "Lorilleux can do as he pleases in regard to being your witness. I only ask for peace."

Gervaise, in her embarrassment, had been pushing about with her feet some of the rubbish on the floor; then fearing she had done some harm, she stooped to ascertain. Lorilleux hastily approached her with a lamp and looked at her fingers with evident suspicion.

"Take care," he said. "Those small bits of gold stick to the shoes sometimes and are carried off without your knowing it."

This was a matter of some importance, of course, for his employers weighed what they entrusted to him. He showed the hare's-foot with which he brushed the particles of gold from the table and the skin spread on his knees to receive them. Twice each week the shop was carefully brushed; all the rubbish was kept and burned, and the ashes were examined, where were found each month twenty-five or thirty francs of gold.

Mme Lorilleux did not take her eyes from the shoes of her guest.

"If Mademoiselle would be so kind," she murmured with an amiable smile,

"and would just look at her soles herself. There is no cause for offense, I am sure!"

Gervaise, indignant and scarlet, reseated herself and held up her shoes for examination. Coupeau opened the door with a gay good night, and she followed him into the corridor after a word or two of polite farewell.

The Lorilleuxs turned to their work at the end of their room where the tiny forge still glittered. The woman with her chemise slipped off her shoulder, which was red with the reflection from the brazier, was drawing out another wire, the muscles in her throat swelling with her exertions.

The husband, stooping under the green light of the ball of water, was again busy with his pincers, not stopping even to wipe the sweat from his brow.

When Gervaise emerged from the narrow corridors on the sixth landing she said with tears in her eyes:

"This certainly does not promise very well!"

Coupeau shook his head angrily. Lorilleux should pay for this evening! Was there ever such a miser? To care if one carried off three grains of gold in the dust on one's shoes. All the stories his sister told were pure fictions and malice. His sister never meant him to marry; his eating with them saved her at least four sous daily. But he did not care whether they appeared on the twenty-ninth of July or not; he could get along without them perfectly well.

But Gervaise, as she descended the staircase, felt her heart swell with pain and fear. She did not like the strange shadows on the dimly lit stairs. From behind the doors, now closed, came the heavy breathing of sleepers who had gone to their beds on rising from the table. A faint laugh was heard from one room, while a slender thread of light filtered through the keyhole of the old lady who was still busy with her dolls, cutting out the gauze dresses with squeaking scissors. A child was crying on the next floor, and the smell from the sinks was worse than ever and seemed something tangible amid this silent darkness. Then in the courtyard, while Coupeau pulled the cord, Gervaise turned and examined the house once more. It seemed enormous as it stood black against the moonless sky. The gray façades rose tall and spectral; the windows were all shut. No clothes fluttered in the breeze; there was literally not the smallest look of life, except in the few windows that were still lighted. From the damp corner of the courtyard came the drip-drip of the fountain. Suddenly it seemed to Gervaise as if the house were striding toward her and would crush her to the earth. A moment later she smiled at her foolish fancy.

"Take care!" cried Coupeau.

And as she passed out of the courtyard she was compelled to jump over a little sea which had run from the dyer's. This time the water was blue, as blue as the summer sky, and the reflection of the lamps carried by the concierge was like the stars themselves.

CHAPTER III

A MARRIAGE OF THE PEOPLE

GERVAISE did not care for any great wedding. Why should they spend their money so foolishly? Then, too, she felt a little ashamed and did not care to parade their marriage before the whole *Quartier*. But Coupeau objected. It would never do not to have some festivities—a little drive and a supper, perhaps, at a restaurant; he would ask for nothing more. He vowed that no one should drink too much and finally obtained the young woman's consent and organized a picnic at five francs per head at the Moulin d'Argent, Boulevard de la Chapelle. He was a small wine merchant who had a garden back of his restaurant. He made out a list. Among others appeared the names of two of his comrades, Bibi-la-Grillade and Mes-Bottes. It was true that Mes-Bottes crooked his elbow, but he was so deliciously funny that he was always invited to picnics. Gervaise said she, in her turn, would bring her employer, Mme Fauconnier—all told, there would be fifteen at the table. That was quite enough.

Now as Coupeau was literally penniless, he borrowed fifty francs from his employer. He first bought his wedding ring; it cost twelve francs out of the shop, but his brother-in-law purchased it for him for nine at the factory. He then ordered an overcoat, pantaloons and vest from a tailor to whom he paid twenty-five francs on account. His patent-leather shoes and his bolivar could last awhile longer. Then he put aside his ten francs for the picnic, which was what he and Gervaise must pay, and they had precisely six francs remaining, the price of a Mass at the altar of the poor. He had no liking for those black frocks, and it broke his heart to give these beloved francs to them. But a marriage without a Mass, he had heard, was really no marriage at all.

He went to the church to see if he could not drive a better bargain, and for an hour he fought with a stout little priest in a dirty soutane who, finally declaring that God could never bless such a union, agreed that the Mass should cost only five francs. Thus Coupeau had twenty sous in hand with which to begin the world!

Gervaise, in her turn, had made her preparations, had worked late into the night and laid aside thirty francs. She had set her heart on a silk mantelet marked thirteen francs, which she had seen in a shopwindow. She paid for it and bought for ten francs from the husband of a laundress who had died in Mme Fauconnier's house a delaine dress of a deep blue, which she made over entirely. With the seven francs that remained she bought a rose for her cap, a pair of white cotton gloves and shoes for Claude. Fortunately both the boys had nice blouses. She worked for four days mending and making; there was not a hole or a rip in anything. At last the evening before the important day arrived; Gervaise and Coupeau sat together and talked, happy that matters were so nearly concluded. Their arrangements were all made. They were to

go to the mayor's office—the two sisters of Coupeau declared they would remain at home, their presence not being necessary there. Then Mother Coupeau began to weep, saying she wished to go early and hide in a corner, and they promised to take her.

The hour fixed for the party to assemble at the Moulin d'Argent was one o'clock sharp. From then they were to seek an appetite on the Plaine-St-Denis and return by rail. Saturday morning, as he dressed, Coupeau thought with some anxiety of his scanty funds; he supposed he ought to offer a glass of wine and a slice of ham to his witnesses while waiting for dinner; unexpected expenses might arise; no, it was clear that twenty sous was not enough. He consequently, after taking Claude and Etienne to Mme Boche, who promised to appear with them at dinner, ran to his brother-in-law and borrowed ten francs; he did it with reluctance, and the words stuck in his throat, for he half expected a refusal. Lorilleux grumbled and growled but finally lent the money. But Coupeau heard his sister mutter under her breath, "That is a good beginning."

The civil marriage was fixed for half-past ten. The day was clear and the sun intensely hot. In order not to excite observation the bridal pair, the mother and the four witnesses, separated—Gervaise walked in front, having the arm of Lorilleux, while M. Madinier gave his to Mamma Coupeau; on the opposite sidewalk were Coupeau, Boche and Bibi-la-Grillade. These three wore black frock coats and walked with their arms dangling from their rounded shoulders. Boche wore yellow pantaloons. Bibi-la-Grillade's coat was buttoned to the chin, as he had no vest, and a wisp of a cravat was tied around his neck.

M. Madinier was the only one who wore a dress coat, a superb coat with square tails, and people stared as he passed with the stout Mamma Coupeau in a green shawl and black bonnet with black ribbons. Gervaise was very sweet and gentle, wearing her blue dress and her trim little silk mantle. She listened graciously to Lorilleux, who, in spite of the warmth of the day, was nearly lost in the ample folds of a loose overcoat. Occasionally she would turn her head and glance across the street with a little smile at Coupeau, who was none too comfortable in his new clothes. They reached the mayor's office a half-hour too early, and their turn was not reached until nearly eleven. They sat in the corner of the office, stiff and uneasy, pushing back their chairs a little out of politeness each time one of the clerks passed them, and when the magistrate appeared they all rose respectfully. They were bidden to sit down again, which they did, and were the spectators of three marriages—the brides in white and the bridesmaids in pink and blue, quite fine and stylish.

When their own turn came Bibi-la-Grillade had disappeared, and Boche hunted him up in the square, where he had gone to smoke a pipe. All the forms were so quickly completed that the party looked at each other in dismay, feeling as if they had been defrauded of half the ceremony. Gervaise listened with tears in her eyes, and the old lady wept audibly.

Then they turned to the register and wrote their names in big, crooked

letters—all but the newly made husband, who, not being able to write, contented himself with making a cross.

Then the clerk handed the certificate to Coupeau. He, admonished by a touch of his wife's elbow, presented him with five sous.

It was quite a long walk from the mayor's office to the church. The men stopped midway to take a glass of beer, and Gervaise and Mamma Coupeau drank some cassis with water. There was not a particle of shade, for the sun was directly above their heads. The beadle awaited them in the empty church; he hurried them toward a small chapel, asking them indignantly if they were not ashamed to mock at religion by coming so late. A priest came toward them with an ashen face, faint with hunger, preceded by a boy in a dirty surplice. He hurried through the service, gabbling the Latin phrases with sidelong glances at the bridal party. The bride and bridegroom knelt before the altar in considerable embarrassment, not knowing when it was necessary to kneel and when to stand and not always understanding the gestures made by the clerk.

The witnesses thought it more convenient to stand all the time, while Mamma Coupeau, overcome by her tears again, shed them on a prayer book which she had borrowed from a neighbor.

It was high noon. The last Mass was said, and the church was noisy with the movements of the sacristans, who were putting the chairs in their places. The center altar was being prepared for some fete, for the hammers were heard as the decorations were being nailed up. And in the choking dust raised by the broom of the man who was sweeping the corner of the small altar the priest laid his cold and withered hand on the heads of Gervaise and Coupeau with a sulky air, as if he were uniting them as a mere matter of business or to occupy the time between the two Masses.

When the signatures were again affixed to the register in the vestry and the party stood outside in the sunshine, they had a sensation as if they had been driven at full speed and were glad to rest.

"I feel as if I had been at the dentist's. We had no time to cry out before it was all over!"

"Yes," muttered Lorilleux, "they take less than five minutes to do what can't be undone in all one's life! Poor Cadet-Cassis!"

Gervaise kissed her new mother with tears in her eyes but with smiling lips. She answered the old woman gently:

"Do not be afraid. I will do my best to make him happy. If things turn out ill it shall not be my fault."

The party went at once to the Moulin d'Argent. Coupeau now walked with his wife some little distance in advance of the others. They whispered and laughed together and seemed to see neither the people nor the houses nor anything that was going on about them.

At the restaurant Coupeau ordered at once some bread and ham; then seeing that Boche and Bibi-la-Grillade were really hungry, he ordered more wine and more meat. His mother could eat nothing, and Gervaise, who was dying of thirst, drank glass after glass of water barely reddened with wine.

"This is my affair," said Coupeau, going to the counter where he paid four francs, five sous.

The guests began to arrive. Mme Fauconnier, stout and handsome, was the first. She wore a percale gown, ecru ground with bright figures, a rose-colored cravat and a bonnet laden with flowers. Then came Mlle Remanjon in her scanty black dress, which seemed so entirely a part of herself that it was doubtful if she laid it aside at night. The Gaudron household followed. The husband, enormously stout, looked as if his vest would burst at the least movement, and his wife, who was nearly as huge as himself, was dressed in a delicate shade of violet which added to her apparent size.

"Ah," cried Mme Lerat as she entered, "we are going to have a tremendous shower!" And she bade them all look out the window to see how black the clouds were.

Mme Lerat, Coupeau's eldest sister, was a tall, thin woman, very masculine in appearance and talking through her nose, wearing a puce-colored dress that was much too loose for her. It was profusely trimmed with fringe, which made her look like a lean dog just coming out of the water. She brandished an umbrella as she talked, as if it had been a walking stick. As she kissed Gervaise she said:

"You have no idea how the wind blows, and it is as hot as a blast from a furnace!"

Everybody at once declared they had felt the storm coming all the morning. Three days of extreme heat, someone said, always ended in a gust.

"It will blow over," said Coupeau with an air of confidence, "but I wish my sister would come, all the same."

Mme Lorilleux, in fact, was very late. Mme Lerat had called for her, but she had not then begun to dress. "And," said the widow in her brother's ear, "you never saw anything like the temper she was in!"

They waited another half-hour. The sky was growing blacker and blacker. Clouds of dust were rising along the street, and down came the rain. And it was in the first shower that Mme Lorilleux arrived, out of temper and out of breath, struggling with her umbrella, which she could not close.

"I had ten minds," she exclaimed, "to turn back. I wanted you to wait until next Saturday. I knew it would rain today—I was certain of it!"

Coupeau tried to calm her, but she quickly snubbed him. Was it he, she would like to know, who was to pay for her dress if it were spoiled?

She wore black silk, so tight that the buttonholes were burst out, and it showed white on the shoulders, while the skirt was so scant that she could not take a long step.

The other women, however, looked at her silk with envy.

She took no notice of Gervaise, who sat by the side of her mother-in-law. She called to Lorilleux and with his aid carefully wiped every drop of rain from her dress with her handkerchief.

Meanwhile the shower ceased abruptly, but the storm was evidently not over, for sharp flashes of lightning darted through the black clouds.

Suddenly the rain poured down again. The men stood in front of the door

with their hands in their pockets, dismally contemplating the scene. The women crouched together with their hands over their eyes. They were in such terror they could not talk; when the thunder was heard farther off they all plucked up their spirits and became impatient, but a fine rain was falling that looked interminable.

"What are we to do?" cried Mme Lorilleux crossly.

Then Mlle Remanjon timidly observed that the sun perhaps would soon be out, and they might yet go into the country; upon this there was one general shout of derision.

"Nice walking it would be! And how pleasant the grass would be to sit upon!"

Something must be done, however, to get rid of the time until dinner. Bibila-Grillade proposed cards; Mme Lerat suggested storytelling. To each proposition a thousand objections were offered. Finally when Lorilleux proposed that the party should visit the tomb of Abélard and Héloïse his wife's indignation burst forth.

She had dressed in her best only to be drenched in the rain and to spend the day in a wineshop, it seemed! She had had enough of the whole thing and she would go home. Coupeau and Lorilleux held the door, she exclaiming violently:

"Let me go; I tell you I will go!"

Her husband having induced her to listen to reason, Coupeau went to Gervaise, who was calmly conversing with her mother-in-law and Mme Fauconnier.

"Have you nothing to propose?" he asked, not venturing to add any term of endearment.

"No," she said with a smile, "but I am ready to do anything you wish. I am very well suited as I am."

Her face was indeed as sunny as a morning in May. She spoke to everyone kindly and sympathetically. During the storm she had sat with her eyes riveted on the clouds, as if by the light of those lurid flashes she was reading the solemn book of the future.

M. Madinier had proposed nothing; he stood leaning against the counter with a pompous air; he spat upon the ground, wiped his mouth with the back of his hand and rolled his eyes about.

"We could go to the Musée du Louvre, I suppose," and he smoothed his chin while awaiting the effect of this proposition.

"There are antiquities there—statues, pictures, lots of things. It is very instructive. Have any of you been there?" he asked.

They all looked at each other. Gervaise had never even heard of the place, nor had Mme Fauconnier nor Boche. Coupeau thought he had been there one Sunday, but he was not sure, but Mme Lorilleux, on whom Madinier's air of importance had produced a profound impression, approved of the idea. The day was wasted anyway; therefore, if a little instruction could be got it would be well to try it. As the rain was still falling, they borrowed old umbrellas of

every imaginable hue from the establishment and started forth for the Musée du Louvre.

There were twelve of them, and they walked in couples, Mme Lorilleux with Madinier, to whom she grumbled all the way.

"We know nothing about her," she said, "not even where he picked her up. My husband has already lent them ten francs, and whoever heard of a bride without a single relation? She said she had a sister in Paris. Where is she to-day, I should like to know!"

She checked herself and pointed to Gervaise, whose lameness was very perceptible as she descended the hill.

"Just look at her!" she muttered. "Wooden legs!"

This epithet was heard by Mme Fauconnier, who took up the cudgels for Gervaise who, she said, was as neat as a pin and worked like a tiger.

The wedding party, coming out of La Rue St-Denis, crossed the boulevard under their umbrellas amid the pouring rain, driving here and there among the carriages. The drivers, as they pulled up their horses, shouted to them to look out, with an oath. On the gray and muddy sidewalk the procession was very conspicuous—the blue dress of the bride, the canary-colored breeches of one of the men, Madinier's square-tailed coat—all gave a carnivallike air to the group. But it was the hats of the party that were the most amusing, for they were of all heights, sizes and styles. The shopkeepers on the boulevard crowded to their windows to enjoy the drollery of the sight. The wedding procession, quite undisturbed by the observation it excited, went gaily on. They stopped for a moment on the Place des Victoires—the bride's shoestrings were untied—she fastened it at the foot of the statue of Louis XIV, her friends waiting as she did so.

Finally they reached the Louvre. Here Madinier politely asked permission to take the head of the party; the place was so large, he said, that it was a very easy thing to lose oneself; he knew the prettiest rooms and the things best worth seeing, because he had often been there with an artist, a very intelligent fellow, from whom a great manufacturer of pasteboard boxes bought pictures.

The party entered the museum of Assyrian antiquities. They shivered and walked about, examining the colossal statues, the gods in black marble, strange beasts and monstrosities, half cats and half women. This was not amusing, and an inscription in Phœnician characters appalled them. Who on earth had ever read such stuff as that? It was meaningless nonsense!

But Madinier shouted to them from the stairs, "Come on! That is nothing! Much more interesting things up here, I assure you!"

The severe nudity of the great staircase cast a gloom over their spirits; an usher in livery added to their awe, and it was with great respect and on the tips of their toes they entered the French gallery.

How many statues! How many pictures! They wished they had all the money they had cost.

In the Galerie d'Apollon the floor excited their admiration; it was smooth as glass; even the feet of the sofas were reflected in it. Madinier bade them look at the ceiling and at its many beauties of decoration, but they said they

dared not look up. Then before entering the Salon Carré he pointed to the window and said:

"That is the balcony where Charles IX fired on the people!"

With a magnificent gesture he ordered his party to stand still in the center of the Salon Carré.

"There are only chefs-d'œuvres here," he whispered as solemnly as if he had been in a church.

They walked around the salon. Gervaise asked the meaning of one of the pictures, the *Noces de Cana*; Coupeau stopped before *La Joconde*, declaring that it was like one of his aunts.

Boche and Bibi-la-Grillade snickered and pushed each other at the sight of the nude female figures, and the Gaudrons, husband and wife, stood open-mouthed and deeply touched before Murillo's Virgin.

When they had been once around the room Madinier, who was quite attentive to Mme Lorilleux on account of her silk gown, proposed they should do it over again; it was well worth it, he said.

He never hesitated in replying to any question which she addressed to him in her thirst for information, and when she stopped before Titian's Mistress, whose yellow hair struck her as like her own, he told her it was a mistress of Henri IV, who was the heroine of a play then running at the Ambigu.

The wedding party finally entered the long gallery devoted to the Italian and Flemish schools of art. The pictures were all meaningless to them, and their heads were beginning to ache. They felt a thrill of interest, however, in the copyists with their easels, who painted without being disturbed by spectators. The artists scattered through the rooms had heard that a primitive wedding party was making a tour of the Louvre and hurried with laughing faces to enjoy the scene, while the weary bride and bridegroom, accompanied by their friends, clumsily moved about over the shining, resounding floors much like cattle let loose and with quite as keen an appreciation of the marvelous beauties about them.

The women vowing their backs were broken standing so long, and Madinier, declaring he knew the way, said they would leave after he had shown them a certain room to which he could go with his eyes shut. But he was very much mistaken. Salon succeeded to salon, and finally the party went up a flight of stairs and found themselves among cannons and other instruments of war. Madinier, unwilling to confess that he had lost himself, wandered distractedly about, declaring that the doors had been changed. The party began to feel that they were there for life, when suddenly to their great joy they heard the cry of the janitors resounding from room to room.

"Time to close the doors!"

They meekly followed one of them, and when they were outside they uttered a sigh of relief as they put up their umbrellas once more, but one and all affected great pleasure at having been to the Louvre.

The clock struck four. There were two hours to dispose of before dinner. The women would have liked to rest, but the men were more energetic and proposed another walk, during which so tremendous a shower fell that umbrellas

were useless and dresses were irretrievably ruined. Then M. Madinier suggested that they should ascend the column on the Place Vendôme.

"It is not a bad idea," cried the men. And the procession began the ascent of the spiral staircase, which Boche said was so old that he could feel it shake. This terrified the ladies, who uttered little shrieks, but Coupeau said nothing; his arm was around his wife's waist, and just as they emerged upon the platform he kissed her.

"Upon my word!" cried Mme Lorilleux, much scandalized.

Madinier again constituted himself master of ceremonies and pointed out all the monuments, but Mme Fauconnier would not put her foot outside the little door; she would not look down on that pavement for all the world, she said, and the party soon tired of this amusement and descended the stairs. At the foot Madinier wished to pay, but Coupeau interfered and put into the hand of the guard twenty-four sous—two for each person. It was now half-past five; they had just time to get to the restaurant, but Coupeau proposed a glass of vermouth first, and they entered a cabaret for that purpose.

When they returned to the Moulin d'Argent they found Mme Boche with the two children, talking to Mamma Coupeau near the table, already spread and waiting. When Gervaise saw Claude and Etienne she took them both on her knees and kissed them lovingly.

"Have they been good?" she asked.

"I should think Coupeau would feel rather queer!" said Mme Lorilleux as she looked on grimly.

Gervaise had been calm and smiling all day, but she had quietly watched her husband with the Lorilleuxs. She thought Coupeau was afraid of his sister—cowardly, in fact. The evening previous he had said he did not care a sou for their opinion on any subject and that they had the tongues of vipers, but now he was with them, he was like a whipped hound, hung on their words and anticipated their wishes. This troubled his wife, for it augured ill, she thought, for their future happiness.

"We won't wait any longer for Mes-Bottes," cried Coupeau. "We are all here but him, and his scent is good! Surely he can't be waiting for us still at St-Denis!"

The guests, in good spirits once more, took their seats with a great clatter of chairs.

Gervaise was between Lorilleux and Madinier, and Coupeau between Mme Fauconnier and his sister Mme Lorilleux. The others seated themselves.

"No one has asked a blessing," said Boche as the ladies pulled the tablecloth well over their skirts to protect them from spots.

But Mme Lorilleux frowned at this poor jest. The vermicelli soup, which was cold and greasy, was eaten with noisy haste. Two *garçons* served them, wearing aprons of a very doubtful white and greasy vests.

Through the four windows, open on the courtyard and its acacias, streamed the light, soft and warm, after the storm. The trees, bathed in the setting sun, imparted a cool, green tinge to the dingy room, and the shadows of the waving branches and quivering leaves danced over the cloth.

There were two fly-specked mirrors at either end of the room, which indefinitely lengthened the table spread with thick china. Every time the *garçons* opened the door into the kitchen there came a strong smell of burning fat.

"Don't let us all talk at once!" said Boche as a dead silence fell on the room, broken by the abrupt entrance of Mes-Bottes.

"You are nice people!" he exclaimed. "I have been waiting for you until I am wet through and have a fishpond in each pocket."

This struck the circle as the height of wit, and they all laughed while he ordered the *garçon* to and fro. He devoured three plates of soup and enormous slices of bread. The head of the establishment came and looked in in considerable anxiety; a laugh ran around the room. Mes-Bottes recalled to their memories a day when he had eaten twelve hard-boiled eggs and drunk twelve glasses of wine while the clock was striking twelve.

There was a brief silence. A waiter placed on the table a rabbit stew in a deep dish. Coupeau turned round.

"Say, boy, is that a gutter rabbit? It mews still."

And the low mewing of a cat seemed, indeed, to come from the dish. This delicate joke was perpetrated by Coupeau in the throat, without the smallest movement of his lips. This feat always met with such success that he never ordered a meal anywhere without a rabbit stew. The ladies wiped their eyes with their napkins because they laughed so much.

Mme Fauconnier begged for the head—she adored the head—and Boche asked especially for onions.

Mme Lerat compressed her lips and said morosely:

"Of course. I might have known that!"

Mme Lerat was a hard-working woman. No man had ever put his nose within her door since her widowhood, and yet her instincts were thoroughly bad; every word uttered by others bore to her ears a double meaning, a coarse allusion sometimes so deeply veiled that no one but herself could grasp its meaning.

Boche leaned over her with a sensual smile and entreated an explanation. She shook her head.

"Of course," she repeated. "Onions! I knew it!"

Everybody was talking now, each of his own trade. Madinier declared that boxmaking was an art, and he cited the New Year bonbon boxes as wonders of luxury. Lorilleux talked of his chains, of their delicacy and beauty. He said that in former times jewelers wore swords at their sides. Coupeau described a weathercock made by one of his comrades out of tin. Mme Lerat showed Bibi-la-Grillade how a rose stem was made by rolling the handle of her knife between her bony fingers, and Mme Fauconnier complained loudly of one of her apprentices who the night before had badly scorched a pair of linen sheets.

"It is no use to talk!" cried Lorilleux, striking his fist on the table. "Gold is gold!"

A profound silence followed the utterance of this truism, amid which arose from the other end of the table the piping tones of Mlle Remanjon's voice as she said:

"And then I sew on the skirt. I stick a pin in the head to hold on the cap, and it is done. They sell for three cents."

She was describing her dolls to Mes-Bottes, whose jaws worked steadily, like machinery.

He did not listen, but he nodded at intervals, with his eyes fixed on the *garçons* to see that they carried away no dishes that were not emptied.

There had been veal cutlets and string beans served. As a *rôti*, two lean chickens on a bed of water cresses were brought in. The room was growing very warm; the sun was lingering on the tops of the acacias, but the room was growing dark. The men threw off their coats and ate in their shirt sleeves.

"Mme Boche," cried Gervaise, "please don't let those children eat so much."

But Mme Coupeau interposed and declare! that for once in a while a little fit of indigestion would do them no harm.

Mme Boche accused her husband of holding Mme Lerat's hand under the table.

Madinier talked politics. He was a Republican, and Bibi-la-Grillade and himself were soon in a hot discussion.

"Who cares," cried Coupeau, "whether we have a king, an emperor or a president, so long as we earn our five francs per day!"

Lorilleux shook his head. He was born on the same day as the Comte de Chambord, September 29, 1820, and this coincidence dwelt in his mind. He seemed to feel that there was a certain connection between the return of the king to France and his own personal fortunes. He did not say distinctly what he expected, but it was clear that it was something very agreeable.

The dessert was now on the table—a floating island flanked by two plates of cheese and two of fruit. The floating island was a great success. Mes-Bottes ate all the cheese and called for more bread. And then as some of the custard was left in the dish, he pulled it toward him and ate it as if it had been soup.

"How extraordinary!" said Madinier, filled with admiration.

The men rose to light their pipes and, as they passed Mes-Bottes, asked him how he felt.

Bibi-la-Grillade lifted him from the floor, chair and all.

"Zounds!" he cried. "The fellow's weight has doubled!"

Coupeau declared his friend had only just begun his night's work, that he would eat bread until dawn. The waiters, pale with fright, disappeared. Boche went downstairs on a tour of inspection and stated that the establishment was in a state of confusion, that the proprietor, in consternation, had sent out to all the bakers in the neighborhood, that the house, in fact, had an utterly ruined aspect.

"I should not like to take you to board," said Mme Gaudron.

"Let us have a punch," cried Mes-Bottes.

But Coupeau, seeing his wife's troubled face, interfered and said no one should drink anything more. They had all had enough.

This declaration met with the approval of some of the party, but the others sided with Mes-Bottes.

"Those who are thirsty are thirsty," he said. "No one need drink that does

not wish to do so, I am sure." And he added with a wink, "There will be all the more for those who do!"

Then Coupeau said they would settle the account, and his friend could do as he pleased afterward.

Alas! Mes-Bottes could produce only three francs; he had changed his five-franc piece, and the remainder had melted away somehow on the road from St-Denis. He handed over the three francs, and Coupeau, greatly indignant, borrowed the other two from his brother-in-law, who gave the money secretly, being afraid of his wife.

M. Madinier had taken a plate. The ladies each laid down their five francs quietly and timidly, and then the men retreated to the other end of the room and counted up the amount, and each man added to his subscription five sous for the *garçon*.

But when M. Madinier sent for the proprietor the little assembly were shocked at hearing him say that this was not all; there were "extras."

As this was received with exclamations of rage, he went into explanations. He had furnished twenty-five liters of wine instead of twenty, as he agreed. The floating island was an addition, on seeing that the dessert was somewhat scanty, whereupon ensued a formidable quarrel. Coupeau declared he would not pay a sou of the extras.

"There is your money," he said; "take it, and never again will one of us step a foot under your roof!"

"I want six francs more," muttered the man.

The women gathered about in great indignation; not a centime would they give, they declared.

Mme Fauconnier had had a wretched dinner; she said she could have had a better one at home for forty sous. Such arrangements always turned out badly, and Mme Gaudron declared aloud that if people wanted their friends at their weddings they usually invited them out and out.

Gervaise took refuge with her mother-in-law in a distant window, feeling heartily ashamed of the whole scene.

M. Madinier went downstairs with the man, and low mutterings of the storm reached the party. At the end of a half-hour he reappeared, having yielded to the extent of paying three francs, but no one was satisfied, and they all began a discussion in regard to the extras.

The evening was spoiled, as was Mme Lerat's dress; there was no end to the chapter of accidents.

"I know," cried Mme Lorilleux, "that the *garçon* spilled gravy from the chickens down my back." She twisted and turned herself before the mirror until she succeeded in finding the spot.

"Yes, I knew it," she cried, "and he shall pay for it, as true as I live. I wish I had remained at home!"

She left in a rage, and Lorilleux at her heels.

When Coupeau saw her go he was in actual consternation, and Gervaise saw that it was best to make a move at once. Mme Boche had agreed to keep the children with her for a day or two.

Coupeau and his wife hurried out in the hope of overtaking Mme Lorilleux, which they soon did. Lorilleux, with the kindly desire of making all smooth, said:

"We will go to your door with you."

"Your door, indeed!" cried his wife, and then pleasantly went on to express her surprise that they did not postpone their marriage until they had saved enough to buy a little furniture and move away from that hole up under the roof.

"But I have given up that room," said her brother. "We shall have the one Gervaise occupies; it is larger."

Mme Lorilleux forgot herself; she wheeled around suddenly.

"What!" she exclaimed. "You are going to live in Wooden Legs' room?"

Gervaise turned pale. This name she now heard for the first time, and it was like a slap in the face. She heard much more in her sister-in-law's exclamation than met the ear. That room to which allusion was made was the one where she had lived with Lantier for a whole month, where she had wept such bitter tears, but Coupeau did not understand that; he was only wounded by the name applied to his wife.

"It is hardly wise of you," he said sullenly, "to nickname people after that fashion, as perhaps you are not aware of what you are called in your *Quartier*. Cow's-Tail is not a very nice name, but they have given it to you on account of your hair. Why should we not keep that room? It is a very good one."

Mme Lorilleux would not answer. Her dignity was sadly disturbed at being called Cow's-Tail.

They walked on in silence until they reached the Hôtel Boncœur, and just as Coupeau gave the two women a push toward each other and bade them kiss and be friends, a man who wished to pass them on the right gave a violent lurch to the left and came between them.

"Look out!" cried Lorilleux. "It is Father Bazonge. He is pretty full to-night."

Gervaise, in great terror, flew toward the door. Father Bazonge was a man of fifty; his clothes were covered with mud where he had fallen in the street.

"You need not be afraid," continued Lorilleux; "he will do you no harm. He is a neighbor of ours—the third room on the left in our corridor."

But Father Bazonge was talking to Gervaise. "I am not going to eat you, little one," he said. "I have drunk too much, I know very well, but when the work is done the machinery should be greased a little now and then."

Gervaise retreated farther into the doorway and with difficulty kept back a sob. She nervously entreated Coupeau to take the man away.

Bazonge staggered off, muttering as he did so:

"You won't mind it so much one of these days, my dear. I know something about women. They make a great fuss, but they get used to it all the same."

CHAPTER IV

A HAPPY HOME

FOUR YEARS of hard and incessant toil followed this day. Gervaise and Coupeau were wise and prudent. They worked hard and took a little relaxation on Sundays. The wife worked twelve hours of the twenty-four with Mme Fauconnier and yet found time to keep her own home like waxwork. The husband was never known to be tipsy but brought home his wages and smoked his pipe at his own window at night before going to bed. They were the bright and shining lights, the good example of the whole *Quartier*, and as they made jointly about nine francs per day, it was easy to see they were putting by money.

But in the first few months of their married life they were obliged to trim their sails closely and had some trouble to make both ends meet. They took a great dislike to the *Hôtel Boncœur*. They longed for a home of their own with their own furniture. They estimated the cost over and over again and decided that for three hundred and fifty francs they could venture, but they had little hope of saving such a sum in less than two years, when a stroke of good luck befell them.

An old gentleman in Plassans sent for Claude to place him at school. He was a very eccentric old gentleman, fond of pictures and art. Claude was a great expense to his mother, and when Etienne alone was at home they saved the three hundred and fifty francs in seven months. The day they purchased their furniture they took a long and happy walk together, for it was an important step they had taken—important not only in their own eyes but in those of the people around them.

For two months they had been looking for an apartment. They wished, of all things, to take one in the old house where Mme Lorilleux lived, but there was not one single room to be rented, and they were compelled to relinquish the idea. Gervaise was reconciled to this more easily, since she did not care to be thrown in any closer contact with the Lorilleuxs. They looked further. It was essential that Gervaise should be near her friend and employer Mme Fauconnier, and they finally succeeded in their search and were indeed in wonderful luck, for they obtained a large room with a kitchen and tiny bedroom just opposite the establishment of the laundress. It was a small house, two stories, with one steep staircase, and was divided into two lodgings—the one on the right, the other on the left, while the lower floor was occupied by a carriage maker.

Gervaise was delighted. It seemed to her that she was once more in the country—no neighbors, no gossip, no interference—and from the place where she stood and ironed all day at Mme Fauconnier's she could see the windows of her own room.

They moved in the month of April. Gervaise was then near her confinement, but it was she who cleaned and put in order her new home. Every penny was of consequence, she said with pride, now that they would soon have an-

other mouth to feed. She rubbed her furniture, which was of old mahogany, good, but secondhand, until it shone like glass and was quite brokenhearted when she discovered a scratch. She held her breath if she knocked it when sweeping. The commode was her especial pride; it was so dignified and stately. Her pet dream, which, however, she kept to herself, was someday to have a clock to put in the center of the marble slab. If there had not been a baby in prospect she would have purchased this much-coveted article at once, but she sighed and dismissed the thought.

Etienne's bed was placed in the tiny room, almost a closet, and there was room for the cradle by its side. The kitchen was about as big as one's hand and very dark, but by leaving the door open one could see pretty well, and as Gervaise had no big dinners to get she managed comfortably. The large room was her pride. In the morning the white curtains of the alcove were drawn, and the bedroom was transformed into a lovely dining room, with its table in the middle, the commode and a wardrobe opposite each other. A tiny stove kept them warm in cold weather for seven sous per day.

Coupeau ornamented the walls with several engravings—one of a marshal of France on a spirited steed, with his baton in his hand. Above the commode were the photographs of the family, arranged in two lines, with an antique china *bénitier* between. On the corners of the commode a bust of Pascal faced another of Béranger—one grave, the other smiling. It was, indeed, a fair and pleasant home.

"How much do you think we pay here?" Gervaise would ask of each new visitor.

And when too high an estimate was given she was charmed.

"One hundred and fifty francs—not a penny more," she would exclaim. "Is it not wonderful?"

No small portion of the woman's satisfaction arose from an acacia which grew in her courtyard, one of whose branches crossed her window, and the scanty foliage was a whole wilderness to her.

Her baby was born one afternoon. She would not allow her husband to be sent for, and when he came gaily into the room he was welcomed by his pale wife, who whispered to him as he stooped over her:

"My dear, it is a girl."

"All right!" said the tinworker, jesting to hide his real emotion. "I ordered a girl. You always do just what I want!"

He took up the child.

"Let us have a good look at you, young lady! The down on the top of your head is pretty black, I think. Now you must never squall but be as good and reasonable always as your papa and mamma."

Gervaise, with a faint smile and sad eyes, looked at her daughter. She shook her head. She would have preferred a boy, because boys run less risks in a place like Paris. The nurse took the baby from the father's hands and told Gervaise she must not talk. Coupeau said he must go and tell his mother and sister the news, but he was famished and must eat something first. His wife was greatly

disturbed at seeing him wait upon himself, and she tossed about a little and complained that she could not make him comfortable.

"You must be quiet," said the nurse again.

"It is lucky you are here, or she would be up and cutting my bread for me," said Coupeau.

He finally set forth to announce the news to his family and returned in an hour with them all.

The Lorilleuxs, under the influence of the prosperity of their brother and his wife, had become extremely amiable toward them and only lifted their eyebrows in a significant sort of way, as much as to say that they could tell something if they pleased.

"You must not talk, you understand," said Coupeau, "but they would come and take a peep at you, and I am going to make them some coffee."

He disappeared into the kitchen, and the women discussed the size of the baby and whom it resembled. Meanwhile Coupeau was heard banging round in the kitchen, and his wife nervously called out to him and told him where the things were that he wanted, but her husband rose superior to all difficulties and soon appeared with the smoking coffeepot, and they all seated themselves around the table, except the nurse, who drank a cup standing and then departed; all was going well, and she was not needed. If she was wanted in the morning they could send for her.

Gervaise lay with a faint smile on her lips. She only half heard what was said by those about her. She had no strength to speak; it seemed to her that she was dead. She heard the word baptism. Coupeau saw no necessity for the ceremony and was quite sure, too, that the child would take cold. In his opinion, the less one had to do with priests, the better. His mother was horrified and called him a heathen, while the Lorilleuxs claimed to be religious people also.

"It had better be on Sunday," said his sister in a decided tone, and Gervaise consented with a little nod. Everybody kissed her and then the baby, addressing it with tender epithets, as if it could understand, and departed.

When Coupeau was alone with his wife he took her hand and held it while he finished his pipe.

"I could not help their coming," he said, "but I am sure they have given you the headache." And the rough, clumsy man kissed his wife tenderly, moved by a great pity for all she had borne for his sake.

And Gervaise was very happy. She told him so and said her only anxiety now was to be on her feet again as soon as possible, for they had another mouth to feed. He soothed her and asked if she could not trust him to look out for their little one.

In the morning when he went to his work he sent Mme Boche to spend the day with his wife, who at night told him she never could consent to lie still any longer and see a stranger going about her room, and the next day she was up and would not be taken care of again. She had no time for such nonsense! She said it would do for rich women but not for her, and in another week she was at Mme Fauconnier's again at work.

Mme Lorilleux, who was the baby's godmother, appeared on Saturday evening with a cap and baptismal robe, which she had bought cheap because they had lost their first freshness. The next day Lorilleux, as godfather, gave Gervaise six pounds of sugar. They flattered themselves they knew how to do things properly and that evening, at the supper given by Coupeau, did not appear empty-handed. Lorilleux came with a couple of bottles of wine under each arm, and his wife brought a large custard which was a specialty of a certain restaurant.

Yes, they knew how to do things, these people, but they also liked to tell of what they did, and they told everyone they saw in the next month that they had spent twenty francs, which came to the ears of Gervaise, who was none too well pleased.

It was at this supper that Gervaise became acquainted with her neighbors on the other side of the house. These were Mme Goujet, a widow, and her son. Up to this time they had exchanged a good morning when they met on the stairs or in the street, but as Mme Goujet had rendered some small services on the first day of her illness, Gervaise invited them on the occasion of the baptism.

These people were from the *Département du Nord*. The mother repaired laces, while the son, a blacksmith by trade, worked in a factory.

They had lived in their present apartment for five years. Beneath the peaceful calm of their lives lay a great sorrow. Goujet, the husband and father, had killed a man in a fit of furious intoxication and then, while in prison, had choked himself with his pocket handkerchief. His widow and child left Lille after this and came to Paris, with the weight of this tragedy on their hearts and heads, and faced the future with indomitable courage and sweet patience. Perhaps they were overproud and reserved, for they held themselves aloof from those about them. Mme Goujet always wore mourning, and her pale, serene face was encircled with nunlike bands of white. Goujet was a colossus of twenty-three with a clear, fresh complexion and honest eyes. At the manufactory he went by the name of the *Gucule-d'Or* on account of his beautiful blond beard.

Gervaise took a great fancy to these people and when she first entered their apartment was charmed with the exquisite cleanliness of all she saw. Mme Goujet opened the door into her son's room to show it to her. It was as pretty and white as the chamber of a young girl. A narrow iron bed, white curtains and quilt, a dressing table and bookshelves made up the furniture. A few colored engravings were pinned against the wall, and Mme Goujet said that her son was a good deal of a boy still—he liked to look at pictures rather than read. Gervaise sat for an hour with her neighbor, watching her at work with her cushion, its numberless pins and the pretty lace.

The more she saw of her new friends the better Gervaise liked them. They were frugal but not parsimonious. They were the admiration of the neighborhood. Goujet was never seen with a hole or a spot on his garments. He was very polite to all but a little diffident, in spite of his height and broad shoulders. The girls in the street were much amused to see him look away when they met

him; he did not fancy their ways—their forward boldness and loud laughs. One day he came home tipsy. His mother uttered no word of reproach but brought out a picture of his father which was piously preserved in her wardrobe. And after that lesson Goujet drank no more liquor, though he conceived no hatred for wine.

On Sunday he went out with his mother, who was his idol. He went to her with all his troubles and with all his joys, as he had done when little.

At first he took no interest in Gervaise, but after a while he began to like her and treated her like a sister, with abrupt familiarity.

Cadet-Cassis, who was a thorough Parisian, thought Gucule-d'Or very stupid. What was the sense of turning away from all the pretty girls he met in the street? But this did not prevent the two young fellows from liking each other very heartily.

For three years the lives of these people flowed tranquilly on without an event. Gervaise had been elevated in the laundry where she worked, had higher wages and decided to place Etienne at school. Notwithstanding all her expenses of the household, they were able to save twenty and thirty francs each month. When these savings amounted to six hundred francs Gervaise could not rest, so tormented was she by ambitious dreams. She wished to open a small establishment herself and hire apprentices in her turn. She hesitated, naturally, to take the definite steps and said they would look around for a shop that would answer their purpose; their money in the savings bank was quietly rolling up. She had bought her clock, the object of her ambition; it was to be paid for in a year—so much each month. It was a wonderful clock, rosewood with fluted columns and gilt moldings and pendulum. She kept her bankbook under the glass shade, and often when she was thinking of her shop she stood with her eyes fixed on the clock, as if she were waiting for some especial and solemn moment.

The Coupeaus and the Goujets now went out on Sundays together. It was an orderly party with a dinner at some quiet restaurant. The men drank a glass or two of wine and came home with the ladies and counted up and settled the expenditures of the day before they separated. The Lorilleuxs were bitterly jealous of these new friends of their brother's. They declared it had a very queer look to see him and his wife always with strangers rather than with his own family, and Mme Lorilleux began to say hateful things again of Gervaise. Mme Lerat, on the contrary, took her part, while Mamma Coupeau tried to please everyone.

The day that Nana—which was the pet name given to the little girl—was three years old Coupeau, on coming in, found his wife in a state of great excitement. She refused to give any explanation, saying, in fact, there really was nothing the matter, but she finally became so abstracted that she stood still with the plates in her hand as she laid the table for dinner, and her husband insisted on an explanation.

"If you must know," she said, "that little shop in La Rue de la Goutte-d'Or is vacant. I heard so only an hour ago, and it struck me all of a heap!"

It was a very nice shop in the very house of which they had so often thought.

There was the shop itself—a back room—and two others. They were small, to be sure, but convenient and well arranged; only she thought it dear—five hundred francs.

"You asked the price then?"

"Yes, I asked it just out of curiosity," she answered with an air of indifference, "but it is too dear, decidedly too dear. It would be unwise, I think, to take it."

But she could talk of nothing else the whole evening. She drew the plan of the rooms on the margin of a newspaper, and as she talked she measured the furniture, as if they were to move the next day. Then Coupeau, seeing her great desire to have the place, declared he would see the owner the next morning, for it was possible he would take less than five hundred francs, but how would she like to live so near his sister, whom she detested?

Gervaise was displeased at this and said she detested no one and even defended the Lorilleuxs, declaring they were not so bad, after all. And when Coupeau was asleep her busy brain was at work arranging the rooms which as yet they had not decided to hire.

The next day when she was alone she lifted the shade from the clock and opened her bankbook. Just to think that her shop and future prosperity lay between those dirty leaves!

Before going to her work she consulted Mme Goujet, who approved of the plan. With a husband like hers, who never drank, she could not fail of success. At noon she called on her sister-in-law to ask her advice, for she did not wish to have the air of concealing anything from the family.

Mme Lorilleux was confounded. What, did Wooden Legs think of having an establishment of her own? And with an envious heart she stammered out that it would be very well, certainly, but when she had recovered herself a little she began to talk of the dampness of the courtyard and of the darkness of the *rez-de-chaussée*. Oh yes, it was a capital place for rheumatism, but of course if her mind was made up anything she could say would make no difference.

That night Gervaise told her husband that if he had thrown any obstacles in the way of her taking the shop she believed she should have fallen sick and died, so great was her longing. But before they came to any decision they must see if a diminution of the rent could be obtained.

"We can go tomorrow if you say so," was her husband's reply; "you can call for me at six o'clock."

Coupeau was then completing the roof of a three-storied house and was laying the very last sheets of zinc. It was May and a cloudless evening. The sun was low in the horizon, and against the blue sky the figure of Coupeau was clearly defined as he cut his zinc as quietly as a tailor might have cut out a pair of breeches in his workshop. His assistant, a lad of seventeen, was blowing up the furnace with a pair of bellows, and at each puff a great cloud of sparks arose.

"Put in the irons, Zidore!" shouted Coupeau.

The boy thrust the irons among the coals which showed only a dull pink

in the sunlight and then went to work again with his bellows. Coupeau took up his last sheet of zinc. It was to be placed on the edge of the roof, near the gutter. Just at that spot the roof was very steep. The man walked along in his list slippers much as if he had been at home, whistling a popular melody. He allowed himself to slip a little and caught at the chimney, calling to Zidore as he did so:

"Why in thunder don't you bring the irons? What are you staring at?"

But Zidore, quite undisturbed, continued to stare at a cloud of heavy black smoke that was rising in the direction of Grenelle. He wondered if it were a fire, but he crawled with the irons toward Coupeau, who began to solder the zinc, supporting himself on the point of one foot or by one finger, not rashly, but with calm deliberation and perfect coolness. He knew what he could do and never lost his head. His pipe was in his mouth, and he would occasionally turn to spit down into the street below.

"Hallo, Madame Boche!" he cried as he suddenly caught sight of his old friend crossing the street. "How are you today?"

She looked up, laughed, and a brisk conversation ensued between the roof and the street. She stood with her hands under her apron and her face turned up, while he, with one arm round a flue, leaned over the side of the house.

"Have you seen my wife?" he asked.

"No indeed; is she anywhere round?"

"She is coming for me. Is everyone well with you?"

"Yes, all well, thanks. I am going to a butcher near here who sells cheaper than up our way."

They raised their voices because a carriage was passing, and this brought to a neighboring window a little old woman, who stood in breathless horror, expecting to see the man fall from the roof in another minute.

"Well, good night," cried Mme Boche. "I must not detain you from your work."

Coupeau turned and took the iron Zidore held out to him. At the same moment Mme Boche saw Gervaise coming toward her with little Nana trotting at her side. She looked up to the roof to tell Coupeau, but Gervaise closed her lips with an energetic signal, and then as she reached the old concierge she said in a low voice that she was always in deadly terror that her husband would fall. She never dared look at him when he was in such places.

"It is not very agreeable, I admit," answered Mme Boche. "My man is a tailor, and I am spared all this."

"At first," continued Gervaise, "I had not a moment's peace. I saw him in my dreams on a litter, but now I have got accustomed to it somewhat."

She looked up, keeping Nana behind her skirts, lest the child should call out and startle her father, who was at that moment on the extreme edge. She saw the soldering iron and the tiny flame that rose as he carefully passed it along the edges of the zinc. Gervaise, pale with suspense and fear, raised her hands mechanically with a gesture of supplication. Coupeau ascended the steep roof with a slow step, then glancing down, he beheld his wife.

"You are watching me, are you?" he cried gaily. "Ah, Madame Boche, is she not a silly one? She was afraid to speak to me. Wait ten minutes, will you?"

The two women stood on the sidewalk, having as much as they could do to restrain Nana, who insisted on fishing in the gutter.

The old woman still stood at the window, looking up at the roof and waiting.

"Just see her," said Mme Boche. "What is she looking at?"

Coupeau was heard lustily singing; with the aid of a pair of compasses he had drawn some lines and now proceeded to cut a large fan; this he adroitly, with his tools, folded into the shape of a pointed mushroom. Zidore was again heating the irons. The sun was setting just behind the house, and the whole western sky was flushed with rose, fading to a soft violet, and against this sky the figures of the two men, immeasurably exaggerated, stood clearly out, as well as the strange form of the zinc which Coupeau was then manipulating.

"Zidore! The irons!"

But Zidore was not to be seen. His master, with an oath, shouted down the scuttle window which was open near by and finally discovered him two houses off. The boy was taking a walk, apparently, with his scanty blond hair blowing all about his head.

"Do you think you are in the country?" cried Coupeau in a fury. "You are another Béranger, perhaps—composing verses! Will you have the kindness to give me my irons? Whoever heard the like? Give me my irons, I say!"

The irons hissed as he applied them, and he called to Gervaise:

"I am coming!"

The chimney to which he had fitted this cap was in the center of the roof. Gervaise stood watching him, soothed by his calm self-possession. Nana clapped her little hands.

"Papa! Papa!" she cried. "Look!"

The father turned; his foot slipped; he rolled down the roof slowly, unable to catch at anything.

"Good God!" he said in a choked voice, and he fell; his body turned over twice and crashed into the middle of the street with the dull thud of a bundle of wet linen.

Gervaise stood still. A shriek was frozen on her lips. Mme Boche snatched Nana in her arms and hid her head that she might not see, and the little old woman opposite, who seemed to have waited for this scene in the drama, quietly closed her windows.

Four men bore Coupeau to a druggist's at the corner, where he lay for an hour while a litter was sent for from the Hospital Lariboisière. He was breathing still, but that was all. Gervaise knelt at his side, hysterically sobbing. Every minute or two, in spite of the prohibition of the druggist, she touched him to see if he were still warm. When the litter arrived and they spoke of the hospital, she started up, saying violently:

"No—no! Not to the hospital—to our own home."

In vain did they tell her that the expenses would be very great if she nursed him at home.

"No—no!" she said. "I will show them the way. He is my husband, is he not? And I will take care of him myself."

And Coupeau was carried home, and as the litter was borne through the *Quartier* the women crowded together and extolled Gervaise. She was a little lame, to be sure, but she was very energetic, and she would save her man.

Mme Boche took Nana home and then went about among her friends to tell the story with interminable details.

"I saw him fall," she said. "It was all because of the child; he was going to speak to her, when down he went. Good lord! I trust I may never see such another sight."

For a week Coupeau's life hung on a thread. His family and his friends expected to see him die from one hour to another. The physician, an experienced physician whose every visit cost five francs, talked of a lesion, and that word was in itself very terrifying to all but Gervaise, who, pale from her vigils but calm and resolute, shrugged her shoulders and would not allow herself to be discouraged. Her man's leg was broken; that she knew very well, "but he need not die for that!" And she watched at his side night and day, forgetting her children and her home and everything but him.

On the ninth day, when the physician told her he would recover, she dropped, half fainting, on a chair, and at night she slept for a couple of hours with her head on the foot of his bed.

This accident to Coupeau brought all his family about him. His mother spent the nights there, but she slept in her chair quite comfortably. Mme Lerat came in every evening after work was over to make inquiries.

The Lorilleuxs at first came three or four times each day and brought an armchair for Gervaise, but soon quarrels and discussions arose as to the proper way of nursing the invalid, and Mme Lorilleux lost her temper and declared that had Gervaise stayed at home and not gone to pester her husband when he was at work the accident would not have happened.

When she saw Coupeau out of danger Gervaise allowed his family to approach him as they saw fit. His convalescence would be a matter of months. This again was a ground of indignation for Mme Lorilleux.

"What nonsense it was," she said, "for Gervaise to take him home! Had he gone to the hospital he would have recovered as quickly again."

And then she made a calculation of what these four months would cost: First, there was the time lost, then the physician, the medicines, the wines and finally the meat for beef tea. Yes, it would be a pretty sum, to be sure! If they got through it on their savings they would do well, but she believed that the end would be that they would find themselves head over heels in debt, and they need expect no assistance from his family, for none of them was rich enough to pay for sickness at home!

One evening Mme Lorilleux was malicious enough to say:

"And your shop, when do you take it? The concierge is waiting to know what you mean to do."

Gervaise gasped. She had utterly forgotten the shop. She saw the delight of these people when they believed that this plan was given up, and from that

day they never lost an occasion of twitting her on her dream that had toppled over like a house of cards, and she grew morbid and fancied they were pleased at the accident to their brother which had prevented the realization of their plans.

She tried to laugh and to show them she did not grudge the money that had been expended in the restoration of her husband's health. She did not withdraw all her savings from the bank at once, for she had a vague hope that some miracle would intervene which would render the sacrifice unnecessary.

Was it not a great comfort, she said to herself and to her enemies, for as such she had begun to regard the Lorilleuxs, that she had this money now to turn to in this emergency?

Her neighbors next door had been very kind and thoughtful to Gervaise all through her trouble and the illness of her husband.

Mme Goujet never went out without coming to inquire if there was anything she could do, any commission she could execute. She brought innumerable bowls of soup and, even when Gervaise was particularly busy, washed her dishes for her. Goujet filled her buckets every morning with fresh water, and this was an economy of at least two sous, and in the evening came to sit with Coupeau. He did not say much, but his companionship cheered and comforted the invalid. He was tender and compassionate and was thrilled by the sweetness of Gervaise's voice when she spoke to her husband. Never had he seen such a brave, good woman; he did not believe she sat in her chair fifteen minutes in the whole day. She was never tired, never out of temper, and the young man grew very fond of the poor woman as he watched her.

His mother had found a wife for him. A girl whose trade was the same as her own, a lace mender, and as he did not wish to go contrary to her desires he consented that the marriage should take place in September.

But when Gervaise spoke of his future he shook his head.

"All women are not like you, Madame Coupeau," he said. "If they were I should like ten wives."

At the end of two months Coupeau was on his feet again and could move—with difficulty, of course—as far as the window, where he sat with his leg on a chair. The poor fellow was sadly shaken by his accident. He was no philosopher, and he swore from morning until night. He said he knew every crack in the ceiling. When he was installed in his armchair it was little better. How long, he asked impatiently, was he expected to sit there swathed like a mummy? And he cursed his ill luck. His accident was a cursed shame. If his head had been disturbed by drink it would have been different, but he was always sober, and this was the result. He saw no sense in the whole thing!

"My father," he said, "broke his neck. I don't say he deserved it, but I do say there was a reason for it. But I had not drunk a drop, and yet over I went, just because I spoke to my child! If there be a Father in heaven, as they say, who watches over us all, I must say He manages things strangely enough sometimes!"

And as his strength returned his trade grew strangely distasteful to him. It was a miserable business, he said, roaming along gutters like a cat. In his

opinion there should be a law which should compel every houseowner to tin his own roof. He wished he knew some other trade he could follow, something that was less dangerous.

For two months more Coupeau walked with a crutch and after a while was able to get into the street and then to the outer boulevard, where he sat on a bench in the sun. His gaiety returned; he laughed again and enjoyed doing nothing. For the first time in his life he felt thoroughly lazy, and indolence seemed to have taken possession of his whole being. When he got rid of his crutches he sauntered about and watched the buildings which were in the process of construction in the vicinity, and he jested with the men and indulged himself in a general abuse of work. Of course he intended to begin again as soon as he was quite well, but at present the mere thought made him feel ill, he said.

In the afternoons Coupeau often went to his sister's apartment; she expressed a great deal of compassion for him and showed every attention. When he was first married he had escaped from her influence, thanks to his affection for his wife and hers for him. Now he fell under her thumb again; they brought him back by declaring that he lived in mortal terror of his wife. But the Lorilleuxs were too wise to disparage her openly; on the contrary, they praised her extravagantly, and he told his wife that they adored her and begged her, in her turn, to be just to them.

The first quarrel in their home arose on the subject of Etienne. Coupeau had been with his sister. He came in late and found the children fretting for their dinner. He cuffed Etienne's ears, bade him hold his tongue and scolded for an hour. He was sure he did not know why he let that boy stay in the house; he was none of his; until that day he had accepted the child as a matter of course.

Three days after this he gave the boy a kick, and it was not long before the child, when he heard him coming, ran into the Goujets', where there was always a corner at the table for him.

Gervaise had long since resumed her work. She no longer lifted the globe of her clock to take out her bankbook; her savings were all gone, and it was necessary to count the sous pretty closely, for there were four mouths to feed, and they were all dependent on the work of her two hands. When anyone found fault with Coupeau and blamed him she always took his part.

"Think how much he has suffered," she said with tears in her eyes. "Think of the shock to his nerves! Who can wonder that he is a little sour? Wait awhile, though, until he is perfectly well, and you will see that his temper will be as sweet as it ever was."

And if anyone ventured to observe that he seemed quite well and that he ought to go to work she would exclaim:

"No indeed, not yet. It would never do." She did not want him down in his bed again. She knew what the doctor had said, and she every day begged him to take his own time. She even slipped a little silver into his vest pocket. All this Coupeau accepted as a matter of course. He complained of all sorts

of pains and aches to gain a little longer period of indolence and at the end of six months had begun to look upon himself as a confirmed invalid.

He almost daily dropped into a wineshop with a friend; it was a place where he could chat a little, and where was the harm? Besides, whoever heard of a glass of wine killing a man? But he swore to himself that he would never touch anything but wine—not a drop of brandy should pass his lips. Wine was good for one—prolonged one's life, aided digestion—but brandy was a very different matter. Notwithstanding all these wise resolutions, it came to pass more than once that he came in, after visiting a dozen different cabarets, decidedly tipsy. On these occasions Gervaise locked her doors and declared she was ill, to prevent the Goujets from seeing her husband.

The poor woman was growing very sad. Every night and morning she passed the shop for which she had so ardently longed. She made her calculations over and over again until her brain was dizzy. Two hundred and fifty francs for rent, one hundred and fifty for moving and the apparatus she needed, one hundred francs to keep things going until business began to come in. No, it could not be done under five hundred francs.

She said nothing of this to anyone, deterred only by the fear of seeming to regret the money she had spent for her husband during his illness. She was pale and dispirited at the thought that she must work five years at least before she could save that much money.

One evening Gervaise was alone. Goujet entered, took a chair in silence and looked at her as he smoked his pipe. He seemed to be revolving something in his mind. Suddenly he took his pipe from his mouth.

"Madame Gervaise," he said, "will you allow me to lend you the money you require?"

She was kneeling at a drawer, laying some towels in a neat pile. She started up, red with surprise. He had seen her standing that very morning for a good ten minutes, looking at the shop, so absorbed that she had not seen him pass.

She refused his offer, however. No, she could never borrow money when she did not know how she could return it, and when he insisted she replied:

"But your marriage? This is the money you have saved for that."

"Don't worry on that account," he said with a heightened color. "I shall not marry. It was an idea of my mother's, and I prefer to lend you the money."

They looked away from each other. Their friendship had a certain element of tenderness which each silently recognized.

Gervaise accepted finally and went with Goujet to see his mother, whom he had informed of his intentions. They found her somewhat sad, with her serene, pale face bent over her work. She did not wish to thwart her son, but she no longer approved of the plan, and she told Gervaise why. With kind frankness she pointed out to her that Coupeau had fallen into evil habits and was living on her labors and would in all probability continue to do so. The truth was that Mme Goujet had not forgiven Coupeau for refusing to read during all his long convalescence; this and many other things had alienated her and her son from him, but they had in no degree lost their interest in Gervaise.

Finally it was agreed she should have five hundred francs and should return the money by paying each month twenty francs on account.

"Well, well!" cried Coupeau as he heard of this financial transaction. "We are in luck. There is no danger with us, to be sure, but if he were dealing with knaves he might never see hide or hair of his cash again!"

The next day the shop was taken, and Gervaise ran about with such a light heart that there was a rumor that she had been cured of her lameness by an operation.

CHAPTER V

AMBITIOUS DREAMS

THE BOCHE COUPLE, on the first of April, moved also and took the loge of the great house in the Rue de la Goutte-d'Or. Things had turned out very nicely for Gervaise who, having always got on very comfortably with the concierge in the house in Rue Neuve, dreaded lest she should fall into the power of some tyrant who would quarrel over every drop of water that was spilled and a thousand other trifles like that. But with Mme Boche all would go smoothly.

The day the lease was to be signed and Gervaise stood in her new home her heart swelled with joy. She was finally to live in that house like a small town, with its intersecting corridors instead of streets.

She felt a strange timidity—a dread of failure—when she found herself face to face with her enterprise. The struggle for bread was a terrible and an increasing one, and it seemed to her for a moment that she had been guilty of a wild, foolhardy act, like throwing herself into the jaws of a machine, for the planes in the cabinetmaker's shop and the hammers in the locksmith's were dimly grasped by her as a part of a great whole.

The water that ran past the door that day from the dyer's was pale green. She smiled as she stepped over it, accepting this color as a happy augury. She, with her husband, entered the loge, where Mme Boche and the owner of the building, M. Marescot, were talking on business.

Gervaise, with a thrill of pain, heard Boche advise the landlord to turn out the dressmaker on the third floor who was behindhand with her rent. She wondered if she would ever be turned out and then wondered again at the attitude assumed by these Boche people, who did not seem to have ever seen her before. They had eyes and ears only for the landlord, who shook hands with his new tenants but, when they spoke of repairs, professed to be in such haste that morning that it would be necessary to postpone the discussion. They reminded him of certain verbal promises he had made, and finally he consented to examine the premises.

The shop stood with its four bare walls and blackened ceiling. The tenant who had been there had taken away his own counters and cases. A furious discussion took place. M. Marescot said it was for them to embellish the shop.

"That may be," said Gervaise gently, "but surely you cannot call putting

on a fresh paper, instead of this that hangs in strips, an embellishment. Whitening the curbing, too, comes under the head of necessary repairs." She only required these two things.

Finally Marescot, with a desperate air, plunged his hands deep in his pockets, shrugged his shoulders and gave his consent to the repairs on the ceiling and to the paper, on condition that she would pay for half the paper, and then he hurried away.

When he had departed Boche clapped Coupeau on the shoulder. "You may thank me for that!" he cried and then went on to say that he was the real master of the house, that he settled the whole business of the establishment, and it was a nod and look from him that had influenced M. Marescot. That evening Gervaise, considering themselves in debt to Boche, sent him some wine.

In four days the shop should have been ready for them, but the repairs hung on for three weeks. At first they intended simply to have the paint scrubbed, but it was so shabby and worn that Gervaise repainted at her own expense. Coupeau went every morning, not to work, but to inspect operations, and Boche dropped the vest or pantaloons on which he was working and gave the benefit of his advice, and the two men spent the whole day smoking and spitting and arguing over each stroke of the brush. Some days the painters did not appear at all; on others they came and walked off in an hour's time, not to return again.

Poor Gervaise wrung her hands in despair. But finally, after two days of energetic labor, the whole thing was done, and the men walked off with their ladders, singing lustily.

Then came the moving, and finally Gervaise called herself settled in her new home and was pleased as a child. As she came up the street she could see her sign afar off:

CLEARSTARCHER

LACES AND EMBROIDERIES

DONE UP WITH ESPECIAL CARE

The first word was painted in large yellow letters on a pale blue ground.

In the recessed window shut in at the back by muslin curtains lay men's shirts, delicate handkerchiefs and cuffs; all these were on blue paper, and Gervaise was charmed. When she entered the door all was blue there; the paper represented a golden trellis and blue morning-glories. In the center was a huge table draped with blue-bordered cretonne to hide the trestles.

Gervaise seated herself and looked round, happy in the cleanliness of all about her. Her first glance, however, was directed to her stove, a sort of furnace whereon ten irons could be heated at once. It was a source of constant anxiety lest her little apprentice should fill it too full of coal and so injure it.

Behind the shop was her bedroom and her kitchen, from which a door opened into the court. Nana's bed stood in a little room at the right, and

Etienne was compelled to share his with the baskets of soiled clothes. It was all very well, except that the place was very damp and that it was dark by three o'clock in the afternoon in winter.

The new shop created a great excitement in the neighborhood. Some people declared that the Coupeaus were on the road to ruin; they had, in fact, spent the whole five hundred francs and were penniless, contrary to their intentions. The morning that Gervaise first took down her shutters she had only six francs in the world, but she was not troubled, and at the end of a week she told her husband after two hours of abstruse calculations that they had taken in enough to cover their expenses.

The Lorilleuxs were in a state of rage, and one morning when the apprentice was emptying, on the sly, a bowl of starch which she had burned in making, just as Mme Lorilleux was passing, she rushed in and accused her sister-in-law of insulting her. After this all friendly relations were at an end.

"It all looks very strange to me," sniffed Mme Lorilleux. "I can't tell where the money comes from, but I have my suspicions." And she went on to intimate that Gervaise and Goujet were altogether too intimate. This was the groundwork of many fables; she said Wooden Legs was so mild and sweet that she had deceived her to the extent that she had consented to become Nana's godmother, which had been no small expense, but now things were very different. If Gervaise were dying and asked her for a glass of water she would not give it. She could not stand such people. As to Nana, it was different; they would always receive her. The child, of course, was not responsible for her mother's crimes. Coupeau should take a more decided stand and not put up with his wife's vile conduct.

Boche and his wife sat in judgment on the quarrel and gave as their opinion that the Lorilleuxs were much to blame. They were good tenants, of course. They paid regularly. "But," added Mme Boche, "I never could abide jealousy. They are mean people and were never known to offer a glass of wine to a friend."

Mother Coupeau visited her son and daughter successive days, listened to the tales of each and said never a word in reply.

Gervaise lived a busy life and took no notice of all this foolish gossip and strife. She greeted her friends with a smile from the door of her shop, where she went for a breath of fresh air. All the people in the neighborhood liked her and would have called her a great beauty but for her lameness. She was twenty-eight and had grown plump. She moved more slowly, and when she took a chair to wait for her irons to heat she rose with reluctance. She was growing fond of good living—that she herself admitted—but she did not regard it as a fault. She worked hard and had a right to good food. Why should she live on potato parings? Sometimes she worked all night when she had a great deal of work on hand.

She did the washing for the whole house and for some Parisian ladies and had several apprentices, besides two laundresses. She was making money hand over fist, and her good luck would have turned a wiser head than her own. But hers was not turned; she was gentle and sweet and hated no one except

her sister-in-law. She judged everybody kindly, particularly after she had eaten a good breakfast. When people called her good she laughed. Why should she not be good? She had seen all her dreams realized. She remembered what she once said—that she wanted to work hard, have plenty to eat, a home to herself, where she could bring up her children, not be beaten and die in her bed! As to dying in her bed, she added she wanted that still, but she would put it off as long as possible, “if you please!” It was to Coupeau himself that Gervaise was especially sweet. Never a cross or an impatient word had he heard from her lips, and no one had ever known her complain of him behind his back. He had finally resumed his trade, and as the shop where he worked was at the other end of Paris, she gave him every morning forty sous for his breakfast, his wine and tobacco. Two days out of six, however, Coupeau would meet a friend, drink up his forty sous and return to breakfast. Once, indeed, he sent a note, saying that his account at the cabaret exceeded his forty sous. He was in pledge, as it were; would his wife send the money? She laughed and shrugged her shoulders. Where was the harm in her husband’s amusing himself a little? A woman must give a man a long rope if she wished to live in peace and comfort. It was not far from words to blows—she knew that very well.

The hot weather had come. One afternoon in June the ten irons were heating on the stove; the door was open into the street, but not a breath of air came in.

“What a melting day!” said Gervaise, who was stooping over a great bowl of starch. She had rolled up her sleeves and taken off her sack and stood in her chemise and white skirt; the soft hair in her neck was curling on her white throat. She dipped each cuff in the starch, the fronts of the shirts and the whole of the skirts. Then she rolled up the pieces tightly and placed them neatly in a square basket after having sprinkled with clear water all those portions which were not starched.

“This basket is for you, Madame Putois,” she said, “and you will have to hurry, for they dry so fast in this weather.”

Mme Putois was a thin little woman who looked cool and comfortable in her tightly buttoned dress. She had not taken her cap off but stood at the table, moving her irons to and fro with the regularity of an automaton. Suddenly she exclaimed:

“Put on your sack, Clémence; there are three men looking in, and I don’t like such things.”

Clémence grumbled and growled. What did she care what she liked? She could not and would not roast to suit anybody.

“Clémence, put on your sack,” said Gervaise. “Madame Putois is right—it is not proper.”

Clémence muttered but obeyed and consoled herself by giving the apprentice, who was ironing hose and towels by her side, a little push. Gervaise had a cap belonging to Mme Boche in her hand and was ironing the crown with a round ball, when a tall, bony woman came in. She was a laundress.

“You have come too soon, Madame Bijard!” cried Gervaise. “I said tonight.

It is very inconvenient for me to attend to you at this hour." At the same time, however, Gervaise amiably laid down her work and went for the dirty clothes, which she piled up in the back shop. It took the two women nearly an hour to sort them and mark them with a stitch of colored cotton.

At this moment Coupeau entered.

"By Jove!" he said. "The sun beats down on one's head like a hammer." He caught at the table to sustain himself; he had been drinking; a spider web had caught in his dark hair, where many a white thread was apparent. His under jaw dropped a little, and his smile was good natured but silly.

Gervaise asked her husband if he had seen the Lorilleuxs in rather a severe tone; when he said no she smiled at him without a word of reproach.

"You had best go and lie down," she said pleasantly. "We are very busy, and you are in our way. Did I say thirty-two handkerchiefs, Madame Bijard? Here are two more; that makes thirty-four."

But Coupeau was not sleepy, and he preferred to remain where he was. Gervaise called Clémence and bade her to count the linen while she made out the list. She glanced at each piece as she wrote. She knew many of them by the color. That pillow slip belonged to Mme Boche because it was stained with the pomade she always used, and so on through the whole. Gervaise was seated with these piles of soiled linen about her. Augustine, whose great delight was to fill up the stove, had done so now, and it was red hot. Coupeau leaned toward Gervaise.

"Kiss me," he said. "You are a good woman."

As he spoke he gave a sudden lurch and fell among the skirts.

"Do take care," said Gervaise impatiently. "You will get them all mixed again." And she gave him a little push with her foot, whereat all the other women cried out.

"He is not like most men," said Mme Putois; "they generally wish to beat you when they come in like this."

Gervaise already regretted her momentary vexation and assisted her husband to his feet and then turned her cheek to him with a smile, but he put his arm round her and kissed her neck. She pushed him aside with a laugh.

"You ought to be ashamed!" she said but yielded to his embrace, and the long kiss they exchanged before these people, amid the sickening odor of the soiled linen and the alcoholic fumes of his breath, was the first downward step in the slow descent of their degradation.

Mme Bijard tied up the linen and staggered off under their weight while Gervaise turned back to finish her cap. Alas! The stove and the irons were alike red hot; she must wait a quarter of an hour before she could touch the irons, and Gervaise covered the fire with a couple of shovelfuls of cinders. She then hung a sheet before the window to keep out the sun. Coupeau took a place in the corner, refusing to budge an inch, and his wife and all her assistants went to work on each side of the square table. Each woman had at her right a flat brick on which to set her iron. In the center of the table was a dish of water with a rag and a brush in it and also a bunch of tall white lilies in a broken jar.

Mme Putois had attacked the basket of linen prepared by Gervaise, and Augustine was ironing her towels, with her nose in the air, deeply interested in a fly that was buzzing about. As to Clémence, she was polishing off her thirty-fifth shirt; as she boasted of this great feat Coupeau staggered toward her.

"Madame," she called, "please keep him away; he will bother me, and I shall scorch my shirt."

"Let her be," said Gervaise without any especial energy. "We are in a great hurry today!"

Well, that was not his fault; he did not mean to touch the girl; he only wanted to see what she was about.

"Really," said his wife, looking up from her fluting iron, "I think you had best go to bed."

He began to talk again.

"You need not make such a fuss, Clémence; it is only because these women are here, and——"

But he could say no more; Gervaise quietly laid one hand on his mouth and the other on his shoulder and pushed him toward his room. He struggled a little and with a silly laugh asked if Clémence was not coming too.

Gervaise undressed her husband and tucked him up in bed as if he had been a child and then returned to her fluting irons in time to still a grand dispute that was going on about an iron that had not been properly cleaned.

In the profound silence that followed her appearance she could hear her husband's thick voice:

"What a silly wife I've got! The idea of putting me to bed in broad daylight!"

Suddenly he began to snore, and Gervaise uttered a sigh of relief. She used her fluting iron for a minute and then said quietly:

"There is no need of being offended by anything a man does when he is in this state. He is not an accountable being. He did not intend to insult you. Clémence, you know what a tipsy man is—he respects neither father nor mother."

She uttered these words in an indifferent, matter-of-fact way, not in the least disturbed that he had forgotten the respect due to her and to her roof and really seeing no harm in his conduct.

The work now went steadily on, and Gervaise calculated they would be finished by eleven o'clock. The heat was intense; the smell of charcoal deadened the air, while the branch of white lilies slowly faded and filled the room with their sweetness.

The day after all this Coupeau had a frightful headache and did not rise until late, too late to go to his work. About noon he began to feel better, and toward evening was quite himself. His wife gave him some silver and told him to go out and take the air, which meant with him taking some wine.

One glass washed down another, but he came home as gay as a lark and quite disgusted with the men he had seen who were drinking themselves to death.

"Where is your lover?" he said to his wife as he entered the shop. This was his favorite joke. "I never see him nowadays and must hunt him up."

He meant Goujet, who came but rarely, lest the gossips in the neighborhood should take it upon themselves to gabble. Once in about ten days he made his appearance in the evening and installed himself in a corner in the back shop with his pipe. He rarely spoke but laughed at all Gervaise said.

On Saturday evenings the establishment was kept open half the night. A lamp hung from the ceiling with the light thrown down by a shade. The shutters were put up at the usual time, but as the nights were very warm the door was left open, and as the hours wore on the women pulled their jackets open a little more at the throat, and he sat in his corner and looked on as if he were at a theater.

The silence of the street was broken by a passing carriage. Two o'clock struck—no longer a sound from outside. At half-past two a man hurried past the door, carrying with him a vision of flying arms, piles of white linen and a glow of yellow light.

Goujet, wishing to save Etienne from Coupeau's rough treatment, had taken him to the place where he was employed to blow the bellows, with the prospect of becoming an apprentice as soon as he was old enough, and Etienne thus became another tie between the clearstarcher and the blacksmith.

All their little world laughed and told Gervaise that her friend worshiped the very ground she trod upon. She colored and looked like a girl of sixteen.

"Dear boy," she said to herself, "I know he loves me, but never has he said or will he say a word of the kind to me!" And she was proud of being loved in this way. When she was disturbed about anything her first thought was to go to him. When by chance they were left alone together they were never disturbed by wondering if their friendship verged on love. There was no harm in such affection.

Nana was now six years old and a most troublesome little sprite. Her mother took her every morning to a school in the Rue Polonceau, to a certain Mlle Josse. Here she did all manner of mischief. She put ashes into the teacher's snuffbox, pinned the skirts of her companions together. Twice the young lady was sent home in disgrace and then taken back again for the sake of the six francs each month. As soon as school hours were over Nana revenged herself for the hours of enforced quiet she had passed by making the most frightful din in the courtyard and the shop.

She found able allies in Pauline and Victor Boche. The whole great house resounded with the most extraordinary noises—the thumps of children falling downstairs, little feet tearing up one staircase and down another and bursting out on the sidewalk like a band of pilfering, impudent sparrows.

Mme Gaudron alone had nine—dirty, unwashed and unkempt, their stockings hanging over their shoes and the slits in their garments showing the white skin beneath. Another woman on the fifth floor had seven, and they came out in twos and threes from all the rooms. Nana reigned over this band, among which there were some half grown and others mere infants. Her prime ministers were Pauline and Victor; to them she delegated a little of

her authority while she played mamma, undressed the youngest only to dress them again, cuffed them and punished them at her own sweet will and with the most fantastic disposition. The band pranced and waded through the gutter that ran from the dyehouse and emerged with blue or green legs. Nana decorated herself and the others with shavings from the cabinetmaker's, which they stole from under the very noses of the workmen.

The courtyard belonged to all of these children, apparently, and resounded with the clatter of their heels. Sometimes this courtyard, however, was not enough for them, and they spread in every direction to the infinite disgust of Mme Boche, who grumbled all in vain. Boche declared that the children of the poor were as plentiful as mushrooms on a dung heap, and his wife threatened them with her broom.

One day there was a terrible scene. Nana had invented a beautiful game. She had stolen a wooden shoe belonging to Mme Boche; she bored a hole in it and put in a string, by which she could draw it like a cart. Victor filled it with apple parings, and they started forth in a procession, Nana drawing the shoe in front, followed by the whole flock, little and big, an imp about the height of a cigar box at the end. They all sang a melancholy ditty full of "ahs" and "ohs." Nana declared this to be always the custom at funerals.

"What on earth are they doing now?" murmured Mme Boche suspiciously, and then she came to the door and peered out.

"Good heavens!" she cried. "It is my shoe they have got."

She slapped Nana, cuffed Pauline and shook Victor. Gervaise was filling a bucket at the fountain, and when she saw Nana with her nose bleeding she rushed toward the concierge and asked how she dared strike her child.

The concierge replied that anyone who had a child like that had best keep her under lock and key. The end of this was, of course, a complete break between the old friends.

But, in fact, the quarrel had been growing for a month. Gervaise, generous by nature and knowing the tastes of the Boche people, was in the habit of making them constant presents—oranges, a little hot soup, a cake or something of the kind. One evening, knowing that the concierge would sell her soul for a good salad, she took her the remains of a dish of beets and chicory. The next day she was dumfounded at hearing from Mlle Remanjon how Mme Boche had thrown the salad away, saying that she was not yet reduced to eating the leavings of other people! From that day forth Gervaise sent her nothing more. The Boches had learned to look on her little offerings as their right, and they now felt themselves to be robbed by the Coupeaus.

It was not long before Gervaise realized she had made a mistake, for when she was one day late with her October rent Mme Boche complained to the proprietor, who came blustering to her shop with his hat on. Of course, too, the Lorilleux extended the right hand of fellowship at once to the Boche people.

There came a day, however, when Gervaise found it necessary to call on the Lorilleux. It was on Mamma Coupeau's account, who was sixty-seven years old, nearly blind and helpless. They must all unite in doing something

for her now. Gervaise thought it a burning shame that a woman of her age, with three well-to-do children, should be allowed for a moment to regard herself as friendless and forsaken. And as her husband refused to speak to his sister, Gervaise said she would.

She entered the room like a whirlwind, without knocking. Everything was just as it was on that night when she had been received by them in a fashion which she had never forgotten or forgiven. "I have come," cried Gervaise, "and I dare say you wish to know why, particularly as we are at daggers drawn. Well then, I have come on Mamma Coupeau's account. I have come to ask if we are to allow her to beg her bread from door to door—"

"Indeed!" said Mme Lorilleux with a sneer, and she turned away.

But Lorilleux lifted his pale face.

"What do you mean?" he asked, and as he had understood perfectly, he went on:

"What is this cry of poverty about? The old lady ate her dinner with us yesterday. We do all we can for her, I am sure. We have not the mines of Peru within our reach, but if she thinks she is to run to and fro between our houses she is much mistaken. I, for one, have no liking for spies." He then added as he took up his microscope, "When the rest of you agree to give five francs per month toward her support we will do the same." Gervaise was calmer now; these people always chilled the very marrow in her bones, and she went on to explain her views. Five francs were not enough for each of the old lady's children to pay. She could not live on fifteen francs per month.

"And why not?" cried Lorilleux. "She ought to do so. She can see well enough to find the best bits in a dish before her, and she can do something toward her own maintenance." If he had the means to indulge such laziness he should not consider it his duty to do so, he added.

Then Gervaise grew angry again. She looked at her sister-in-law and saw her face set in vindictive firmness.

"Keep your money," she cried. "I will take care of your mother. I found a starving cat in the street the other night and took it in. I can take in your mother too. She shall want for nothing. Good heavens, what people!"

Mme Lorilleux snatched up a saucepan.

"Clear out," she said hoarsely. "I will never give one sou—no, not one sou—toward her keep. I understand you! You will make my mother work for you like a slave and put my five francs in your pocket! Not if I know it, madame! And if she goes to live under your roof I will never see her again. Be off with you, I say!"

"What a monster!" cried Gervaise as she shut the door with a bang.

On the very next day Mme Coupeau came to her. A large bed was put in the room where Nana slept. The moving did not take long, for the old lady had only this bed, a wardrobe, table and two chairs. The table was sold and the chairs new-seated, and the old lady the evening of her arrival washed the dishes and swept up the room, glad to make herself useful. Mme Lerat had amused herself by quarreling with her sister, to whom she had expressed

her admiration of the generosity evinced by Gervaise, and when she saw that Mme Lorilleux was intensely exasperated she declared she had never seen such eyes in anybody's head as those of the clearstarcher. She really believed one might light paper at them. This declaration naturally led to bitter words, and the sisters parted, swearing they would never see each other again, and since then Mme Lerat had spent most of her evenings at her brother's.

Three years passed away. There were reconciliations and new quarrels. Gervaise continued to be liked by her neighbors; she paid her bills regularly and was a good customer. When she went out she received cordial greetings on all sides, and she was more fond of going out in these days than of yore. She liked to stand at the corners and chat. She liked to loiter with her arms full of bundles at a neighbor's window and hear a little gossip.

CHAPTER VI

GOUJET AT HIS FORGE

ONE AUTUMNAL AFTERNOON Gervaise, who had been to carry a basket of clothes home to a customer who lived a good way off, found herself in La Rue des Poissonniers just as it was growing dark. It had rained in the morning, and the air was close and warm. She was tired with her walk and felt a great desire for something good to eat. Just then she lifted her eyes and, seeing the name of the street, she took it into her head that she would call on Goujet at his forge. But she would ask for Etienne, she said to herself. She did not know the number, but she could find it, she thought. She wandered along and stood bewildered, looking toward Montmartre; all at once she heard the measured click of hammers and concluded that she had stumbled on the place at last. She did not know where the entrance to the building was, but she caught a gleam of a red light in the distance; she walked toward it and was met by a workman.

"Is it here, sir," she said timidly, "that my child—a little boy, that is to say—works? A little boy by the name of Etienne?"

"Etienne! Etienne!" repeated the man, swaying from side to side. The wind brought from him to her an intolerable smell of brandy, which caused Gervaise to draw back and say timidly:

"Is it here that Monsieur Goujet works?"

"Ah, Goujet, yes. If it is Goujet you wish to see go to the left."

Gervaise obeyed his instructions and found herself in a large room with the forge at the farther end. She spoke to the first man she saw, when suddenly the whole room was one blaze of light. The bellows had sent up leaping flames which lit every crevice and corner of the dusty old building, and Gervaise recognized Goujet before the forge with two other men. She went toward him.

"Madame Gervaise!" he exclaimed in surprise, his face radiant with joy, and then seeing his companions laugh and wink, he pushed Etienne toward his mother. "You came to see your boy," he said; "he does his duty like a hero."

"I am glad of it," she answered, "but what an awful place this is to get at!"

And she described her journey, as she called it, and then asked why no one seemed to know Etienne there.

"Because," said the blacksmith, "he is called Zou Zou here, as his hair is cut short as a Zouave's."

This visit paid by Gervaise to the forge was only the first of many others. She often went on Saturdays when she carried the clean linen to Mme Goujet, who still resided in the same house as before. The first year Gervaise had paid them twenty francs each month, or rather the difference between the amount of their washing, seven or eight francs, and the twenty which she agreed upon. In this way she had paid half the money she had borrowed, when one quarter day, not knowing to whom to turn, as she had not been able to collect her bills punctually, she ran to the Goujets' and borrowed the amount of her rent from them. Twice since she had asked a similar favor, so that the amount of her indebtedness now stood at four hundred and twenty-five francs.

Now she no longer paid any cash but did their washing. It was not that she worked less hard or that her business was falling off. Quite the contrary; but money had a way of melting away in her hands, and she was content nowadays if she could only make both ends meet. What was the use of fussing, she thought? If she could manage to live that was all that was necessary. She was growing quite stout withal.

Mme Goujet was always kind to Gervaise, not because of any fear of losing her money, but because she really loved her and was afraid of her going wrong in some way.

The Saturday after the first visit paid by Gervaise to the forge was also the first of the month. When she reached Mme Goujet's her basket was so heavy that she panted for two good minutes before she could speak. Every one knows how heavy shirts and such things are.

"Have you brought everything?" asked Mme Goujet, who was very exacting on this point. She insisted on every piece being returned each week. Another thing she exacted was that the clothes should be brought back always on the same day and hour.

"Everything is here," answered Gervaise with a smile. "You know I never leave anything behind."

"That is true," replied the elder woman. "You have many faults, my dear, but not that one yet."

And while the laundress emptied her basket, laying the linen on the bed, Mme Goujet paid her many compliments. She never burned her clothes or ironed off the buttons or tore them, but she did use a trifle too much bluing and made her shirts too stiff.

"Feel," she said; "it is like pasteboard. My son never complains, but I know he does not like them so."

"And they shall not be so again," said Gervaise. "No one ever touches any of your things but myself, and I would do them over ten times rather than see you dissatisfied."

She colored as she spoke.

"I have no intention of disparaging your work," answered Mme Goujet. "I never saw anyone who did up laces and embroideries as you do, and the fluting is simply perfect; the only trouble is a little too much starch, my dear. Goujet does not care to look like a fine gentleman."

She took up her book and drew a pen through the pieces as she spoke. Everything was there. She brought out the bundle of soiled clothes. Gervaise put them in her basket and hesitated.

"Madame Goujet," she said at last, "if you do not mind I should like to have the money for this week's wash."

The account this month was larger than usual, ten francs and over. Mme Goujet looked at her gravely.

"My child," she said slowly, "it shall be as you wish. I do not refuse to give you the money if you desire it; only this is not the way to get out of debt. I say this with no unkindness, you understand. Only you must take care."

Gervaise, with downcast eyes, received the lesson meekly. She needed the ten francs to complete the amount due the coal merchant, she said.

But her friend heard this with a stern countenance and told her she should reduce her expenses, but she did not add that she, too, intended to do the same and that in future she should do her washing herself, as she had formerly done, if she were to be out of pocket thus.

When Gervaise was on the staircase her heart was light, for she cared little for the reproof now that she had the ten francs in her hand; she was becoming accustomed to paying one debt by contracting another.

Midway on the stairs she met a tall woman coming up with a fresh mackerel in her hand, and behold! it was Virginie, the girl whom she had whipped in the lavatory. The two looked each other full in the face. Gervaise instinctively closed her eyes, for she thought the girl would slap her in the face with the mackerel. But, no; Virginie gave a constrained smile. Then the laundress, whose huge basket filled up the stairway and who did not choose to be outdone in politeness, said:

"I beg your pardon——"

"Pray don't apologize," answered Virginie in a stately fashion.

And they stood and talked for a few minutes with not the smallest allusion, however, to the past.

Virginie, then about twenty-nine, was really a magnificent-looking woman, head well set on her shoulders and a long, oval face crowned by bands of glossy black hair. She told her history in a few brief words. She was married. Had married the previous spring a cabinetmaker who had given up his trade and was hoping to obtain a position on the police force. She had just been out to buy this mackerel for him.

"He adores them," she said, "and we women spoil our husbands, I think. But come up. We are standing in a draft here."

When Gervaise had, in her turn, told her story and added that Virginie was living in the very rooms where she had lived and where her child was born, Virginie became still more urgent that she should go up. "It is always pleasant

to see a place where one has been happy," she said. She herself had been living on the other side of the water but had got tired of it and had moved into these rooms only two weeks ago. She was not settled yet. Her name was Mme Poisson.

"And mine," said Gervaise, "is Coupeau."

Gervaise was a little suspicious of all this courtesy. Might not some terrible revenge be hidden under it all? And she determined to be well on her guard. But as Virginie was so polite just now she must be polite in her turn.

Poisson, the husband, was a man of thirty-five with a mustache and imperial; he was seated at a table near the window, making little boxes. His only tools were a penknife, a tiny saw and a gluepot; he was executing the most wonderful and delicate carving, however. He never sold his work but made presents of it to his friends. It amused him while he was awaiting his appointment.

Poisson rose and bowed politely to Gervaise, whom his wife called an old friend. But he did not speak, his conversational powers not being his strong point. He cast a plaintive glance at the mackerel, however, from time to time. Gervaise looked around the room and described her furniture and where it had stood. How strange it was, after losing sight of each other so long, that they should occupy the same apartment! Virginie entered into new details. He had a small inheritance from his aunt, and she herself sewed a little—made a dress now and then. At the end of a half-hour Gervaise rose to depart; Virginie went to the head of the stairs with her, and there both hesitated. Gervaise fancied that Virginie wished to say something about Lantier and Adèle, but they separated without touching on these disagreeable topics.

This was the beginning of a great friendship. In another week Virginie could not pass the shop without going in, and sometimes she remained for two or three hours. At first Gervaise was very uncomfortable; she thought every time Virginie opened her lips that she would hear Lantier's name. Lantier was in her mind all the time she was with Mme Poisson. It was a stupid thing to do, after all, for what on earth did she care what had become of Lantier or of Adèle? But she was, nonetheless, curious to know something about them.

Winter had come—the fourth winter that the Coupeaus had spent in La Rue de la Goutte-d'Or. This year December and January were especially severe, and after New Year's the snow lay three weeks in the street without melting. There was plenty of work for Gervaise, and her shop was delightfully warm and singularly quiet, for the carriages made no noise in the snow-covered streets. The laughs and shouts of the children were almost the only sounds; they had made a long slide and enjoyed themselves hugely.

Gervaise took especial pleasure in her coffee at noon. Her apprentices had no reason to complain, for it was hot and strong and unadulterated by chicory. On the morning of Twelfth-day the clock had struck twelve and then half past, and the coffee was not ready. Gervaise was ironing some muslin curtains. Clémence, with a frightful cold, was, as usual, at work on a man's shirt. Mme Putois was ironing a skirt on a board, with a cloth laid on the floor to prevent the skirt from being soiled. Mamma Coupeau brought in

the coffee, and as each one of the women took a cup with a sigh of enjoyment the street door opened and Virginie came in with a rush of cold air.

"Heavens!" she cried. "It is awful! My ears are cut off!"

"You have come just in time for a cup of hot coffee," said Gervaise cordially.

"And I shall be only too glad to have it!" answered Virginie with a shiver. She had been waiting at the grocer's, she said, until she was chilled through and through. The heat of that room was delicious, and then she stirred her coffee and said she liked the damp, sweet smell of the freshly ironed linen. She and Mamma Coupeau were the only ones who had chairs; the others sat on wooden footstools, so low that they seemed to be on the floor. Virginie suddenly stooped down to her hostess and said with a smile:

"Do you remember that day at the lavatory?"

Gervaise colored; she could not answer. This was just what she had been dreading. In a moment she felt sure she would hear Lantier's name. She knew it was coming. Virginie drew nearer to her. The apprentices lingered over their coffee and told each other as they looked stupidly into the street what they would do if they had an income of ten thousand francs. Virginie changed her seat and took a footstool by the side of Gervaise, who felt weak and cowardly and helpless to change the conversation or to stave off what was coming. She breathlessly awaited the next words, her heart big with an emotion which she would not acknowledge to herself.

"I do not wish to give you any pain," said Virginie blandly. "Twenty times the words have been on my lips, but I hesitated. Pray don't think I bear you any malice."

She tipped up her cup and drank the last drop of her coffee. Gervaise, with her heart in her mouth, waited in a dull agony of suspense, asking herself if Virginie could have forgiven the insult in the lavatory. There was a glitter in the woman's eyes she did not like.

"You had an excuse," Virginie added as she placed her cup on the table. "You had been abominably treated. I should have killed someone." And then, dropping her little-affected tone, she continued more rapidly:

"They were not happy, I assure you, not at all happy. They lived in a dirty street, where the mud was up to their knees. I went to breakfast with them two days after he left you and found them in the height of a quarrel. You know that Adèle is a wretch. She is my sister, to be sure, but she is a wretch all the same. As to Lantier—well, you know him, so I need not describe him. But for a yes or a no he would not hesitate to thresh any woman that lives. Oh, they had a beautiful time! Their quarrels were heard all over the neighborhood. One day the police were sent for, they made such a hubbub."

She talked on and on, telling things that were enough to make the hair stand up on one's head. Gervaise listened, as pale as death, with a nervous trembling of her lips which might have been taken for a smile. For seven years she had never heard Lantier's name, and she would not have believed that she could have felt any such overwhelming agitation. She could no longer be jealous of Adèle, but she smiled grimly as she thought of the blows she had received in her turn from Lantier, and she would have listened for hours

to all that Virginie had to tell, but she did not ask a question for some time. Finally she said:

"And do they still live in that same place?"

"No indeed! But I have not told you all yet. They separated a week ago."

"Separated!" exclaimed the clearstarcher.

"Who is separated?" asked Clémence, interrupting her conversation with Mamma Coupeau.

"No one," said Virginie, "or at least no one whom you know."

As she spoke she looked at Gervaise and seemed to take a positive delight in disturbing her still more. She suddenly asked her what she would do or say if Lantier should suddenly make his appearance, for men were so strange; no one could ever tell what they would do. Lantier was quite capable of returning to his old love. Then Gervaise interrupted her and rose to the occasion. She answered with grave dignity that she was married now and that if Lantier should appear she would ask him to leave. There could never be anything more between them, not even the most distant acquaintance.

"I know very well," she said, "that Etienne belongs to him, and if Lantier desires to see his son I shall place no obstacle in his way. But as to myself, Madame Poisson, he shall never touch my little finger again! It is finished."

As she uttered these last words she traced a cross in the air to seal her oath, and as if desirous to put an end to the conversation, she called out to her women:

"Do you think the ironing will be done today if you sit still? To work! To work!"

The women did not move; they were lulled to apathy by the heat, and Gervaise herself found it very difficult to resume her labors. Her curtains had dried in all this time, and some coffee had been spilled on them, and she must wash out the spots.

"Au revoir!" said Virginie. "I came out to buy a half pound of cheese. Poisson will think I am frozen to death!"

The better part of the day was now gone, and it was this way every day, for the shop was the refuge and haunt of all the chilly people in the neighborhood. Gervaise liked the reputation of having the most comfortable room in the *Quartier*, and she held her receptions, as the Lorilleux and Boche clique said, with a sniff of disdain. She would, in fact, have liked to bring in the very poor whom she saw shivering outside. She became very friendly toward a journeyman painter, an old man of seventy, who lived in a loft of the house, where he shivered with cold and hunger. He had lost his three sons in the Crimea, and for two years his hand had been so cramped by rheumatism that he could not hold a brush.

Whenever Gervaise saw Father Bru she called him in, made a place for him near the stove and gave him some bread and cheese. Father Bru, with his white beard and his face wrinkled like an old apple, sat in silent content for hours at a time, enjoying the warmth and the crackling of the coke.

"What are you thinking about?" Gervaise would say gaily.

"Of nothing—of all sorts of things," he would reply with a dazed air.

The workwomen laughed and thought it a good joke to ask if he were in love. He paid little heed to them but relapsed into silent thought.

From this time Virginie often spoke to Gervaise of Lantier, and one day she said she had just met him. But as the clearstarcher made no reply Virginie then said no more. But on the next day she returned to the subject and told her that he had talked long and tenderly of her. Gervaise was much troubled by these whispered conversations in the corner of her shop. The name of Lantier made her faint and sick at heart. She believed herself to be an honest woman. She meant, in every way, to do right and to shun the wrong, because she felt that only in doing so could she be happy. She did not think much of Coupeau because she was conscious of no shortcomings toward him. But she thought of her friend at the forge, and it seemed to her that this return of her interest in Lantier, faint and undecided as it was, was an infidelity to Goujet and to that tender friendship which had become so very precious to her. Her heart was much troubled in these days. She dwelt on that time when her first lover left her. She imagined another day when, quitting Adèle, he might return to her with that old familiar trunk.

When she went into the street it was with a spasm of terror. She fancied that every step behind her was Lantier's. She dared not look around lest his hand should glide about her waist. He might be watching for her at any time. He might come to her door in the afternoon, and this idea brought a cold sweat to her forehead, because he would certainly kiss her on her ear as he had often teased her by doing in the years gone by. It was this kiss she dreaded. Its dull reverberation deafened her to all outside sounds, and she could hear only the beatings of her own heart. When these terrors assailed her the forge was her only asylum, from whence she returned smiling and serene, feeling that Goujet, whose sonorous hammer had put all her bad dreams to flight, would protect her always.

What a happy season this was after all! The clearstarcher always carried a certain basket of clothes to her customer each week, because it gave her a pretext for going into the forge, as it was on her way. As soon as she turned the corner of the street in which it was situated she felt as lighthearted as if she were going to the country. The black charcoal dust in the road, the black smoke rising slowly from the chimneys, interested and pleased her as much as a mossy path through the woods. Afar off the forge was red even at midday, and her heart danced in time with the hammers. Goujet was expecting her and making more noise than usual, that she might hear him at a great distance. She gave Etienne a light tap on his cheek and sat quietly watching these two—this man and boy, who were so dear to her—for an hour without speaking. When the sparks touched her tender skin she rather enjoyed the sensation. He, in his turn, was fully aware of the happiness she felt in being there, and he reserved the work which required skill for the time when she could look on in wonder and admiration. It was an idyl that they were unconsciously enacting all that spring, and when Gervaise returned to her home it was in a spirit of sweet content.

By degrees her unreasonable fears of Lantier were conquered. Coupeau

was behaving very badly at this time, and one evening as she passed the Assommoir she was certain she saw him drinking with Mes-Bottes. She hurried on lest she should seem to be watching him. But as she hastened she looked over her shoulder. Yes, it was Coupeau who was tossing down a glass of liquor with an air as if it were no new thing. He had lied to her then; he did drink brandy. She was in utter despair, and all her old horror of brandy returned. Wine she could have forgiven—wine was good for a working man—liquor, on the contrary, was his ruin and took from him all desire for the food that nourished and gave him strength for his daily toil. Why did not the government interfere and prevent the manufacture of such pernicious things?

When she reached her home she found the whole house in confusion. Her employees had left their work and were in the courtyard. She asked what the matter was.

"It is Father Bijard beating his wife; he is as drunk as a fool, and he drove her up the stairs to her room, where he is murdering her. Just listen!"

Gervaise flew up the stairs. She was very fond of Mne Bijard, who was her laundress and whose courage and industry she greatly admired. On the sixth floor a little crowd was assembled. Mne Boche stood at an open door.

"Have done!" she cried. "Have done, or the police will be summoned."

No one dared enter the room, because Bijard was well known to be like a madman when he was tipsy. He was rarely thoroughly sober, and on the occasional days when he condescended to work he always had a bottle of brandy at his side. He rarely ate anything, and if a match had been touched to his mouth he would have taken fire like a torch.

"Would you let her be killed?" exclaimed Gervaise, trembling from head to foot, and she entered the attic room, which was very clean and very bare, for the man had sold the very sheets off the bed to satisfy his mad passion for drink. In this terrible struggle for life the table had been thrown over, and the two chairs also. On the floor lay the poor woman with her skirts drenched as she had come from the washtub, her hair streaming over her bloody face, uttering low groans at each kick the brute gave her.

The neighbors whispered to each other that she had refused to give him the money she had earned that day. Boche called up the staircase to his wife:

"Come down, I say; let him kill her if he will. It will only make one fool the less in the world!"

Father Bru followed Gervaise into the room, and the two expostulated with the madman. But he turned toward them, pale and threatening; a white foam glistened on his lips, and in his faded eyes there was a murderous expression. He grasped Father Bru by the shoulder and threw him over the table and shook Gervaise until her teeth chattered and then returned to his wife, who lay motionless, with her mouth wide open and her eyes closed; and during this frightful scene little Lalie, four years old, was in the corner, looking on at the murder of her mother. The child's arms were round her sister Henriette, a baby who had just been weaned. She stood with a sad, solemn face and serious, melancholy eyes but shed no tears.

When Bijard slipped and fell Gervaise and Father Bru helped the poor creature to her feet, who then burst into sobs. Lalie went to her side, but she did not cry, for the child was already habituated to such scenes. And as Gervaise went down the stairs she was haunted by the strange look of resignation and courage in Lalie's eyes; it was an expression belonging to maturity and experience rather than to childhood.

"Your husband is on the other side of the street," said Clémence as soon as she saw Gervaise; "he is as tipsy as possible!"

Coupeau reeled in, breaking a square of glass with his shoulder as he missed the doorway. He was not tipsy but drunk, with his teeth set firmly together and a pinched expression about the nose. And Gervaise instantly knew that it was the liquor of the Assommoir which had vitiated his blood. She tried to smile and coaxed him to go to bed. But he shook her off and as he passed her gave her a blow.

He was just like the other—the beast upstairs who was now snoring, tired out by beating his wife. She was chilled to the heart and desperate. Were all men alike? She thought of Lantier and of her husband and wondered if there was no happiness in the world.

CHAPTER VII

A BIRTHDAY FETE

THE NINETEENTH OF JUNE was the clearstarcher's birthday. There was always an excuse for a fete in the Coupeau mansion; saints were invented to serve as a pretext for idleness and festivities. Virginie highly commended Gervaise for living luxuriously. What was the use of her husband drinking up everything? Why should she save for her husband to spend at all the wineshops in the neighborhood? And Gervaise accepted this excuse. She was growing very indolent and much stouter, while her lameness had perceptibly increased.

For a whole month they discussed the preparation for this fete; they talked over dishes and licked their lips. They must have something out of the common way. Gervaise was much troubled as to whom she should invite. She wanted exactly twelve at table, not one more or one less. She, her husband, her mother-in-law and Mme Lerat were four. The Goujets and Poissons were four more. At first she thought she would not ask her two women, Mme Putois and Clémence, lest it should make them too familiar, but as the entertainment was constantly under discussion before them she ended by inviting them too. Thus there were ten; she must have two more. She decided on a reconciliation with the Lorilleuxs, who had extended the olive branch several times lately. Family quarrels were bad things, she said. When the Boche people heard of this they showed several little courtesies to Gervaise, who felt obliged to urge them to come also. This made fourteen without counting the children. She had never had a dinner like this, and she was both triumphant and terrified.

The nineteenth fell on a Monday, and Gervaise thought it very fortunate, as

she could begin her cooking on Sunday afternoon. On Saturday, while the women hurried through their work, there was an endless discussion as to what the dishes should be. In the last three weeks only one thing had been definitely decided upon—a roast goose stuffed with onions. The goose had been purchased, and Mme Coupeau brought it in that Mme Putois might guess its weight. The thing looked enormous, and the fat seemed to burst from its yellow skin.

"Soup before that, of course," said Gervaise, "and we must have another dish."

Clémence proposed rabbits, but Gervaise wanted something more distinguished. Mme Putois suggested a *blanquette du veau*.

That was a new idea. Veal was always good too. Then Mme Coupeau made an allusion to fish, which no one seconded. Evidently fish was not in favor. Gervaise proposed a sparerib of pork and potatoes, which brightened all their faces, just as Virginie came in like a whirlwind.

"You are just in season. Mamma Coupeau, show her the goose," cried Gervaise.

Virginie admired it, guessed the weight and laid it down on the ironing table between an embroidered skirt and a pile of shirts. She was evidently thinking of something else. She soon led Gervaise into the back shop.

"I have come to warn you," she said quickly. "I just met Lantier at the very end of this street, and I am sure he followed me, and I naturally felt alarmed on your account, my dear."

Gervaise turned very pale. What did he want of her? And why on earth should he worry her now amid all the busy preparations for the fete? It seemed as if she never in her life had set her heart on anything that she was not disappointed. Why was it that she could never have a minute's peace?

But Virginie declared that she would look out for her. If Lantier followed her she would certainly give him over to the police. Her husband had been in office now for a month, and Virginie was very dictatorial and aggressive and talked of arresting everyone who displeased her. She raised her voice as she spoke, but Gervaise implored her to be cautious, because her women could hear every word. They went back to the front shop, and she was the first to speak.

"We have said nothing of vegetables," she said quietly.

"Peas, with a bit of pork," said Virginie authoritatively.

This was agreed upon with enthusiasm.

The next day at three Mamma Coupeau lighted the two furnaces belonging to the house and a third one borrowed from Mme Boche, and at half-past three the soup was gently simmering in a large pot lent by the restaurant at the corner. They had decided to cook the veal and the pork the day previous, as those two dishes could be warmed up so well, and would leave for Monday only the goose to roast and the vegetables. The back shop was ruddy with the glow from the three furnaces—sauces were bubbling with a strong smell of browned flour. Mamma Coupeau and Gervaise, each with large white aprons, were washing celery and running hither and thither with pepper and

salt or hurriedly turning the veal with flat wooden sticks made for the purpose. They had told Coupeau pleasantly that his room was better than his company, but they had plenty of people there that afternoon. The smell of the cooking found its way out into the street and up through the house, and the neighbors, impelled by curiosity, came down on all sorts of pretexts, merely to discover what was going on.

About five Virginie made her appearance. She had seen Lantier twice. Indeed, it was impossible nowadays to enter the street and not see him. Mme Boche, too, had spoken to him on the corner below. Then Gervaise, who was on the point of going for a sou's worth of fried onions to season her soup, shuddered from head to foot and said she would not go out ever again. The concierge and Virginie added to her terror by a succession of stories of men who lay in wait for women, with knives and pistols hidden in their coats.

Such things were read every day in the papers! When such a scamp as Lantier found a woman happy and comfortable, he was always wretched until he had made her so too. Virginie said she would go for the onions. "Women," she observed sententiously, "should protect each other, as well as serve each other, in such matters." When she returned she reported that Lantier was no longer there. The conversation around the stove that evening never once drifted from that subject. Mme Boche said that she, under similar circumstances, should tell her husband, but Gervaise was horror-struck at this and begged her never to breathe one single word about it. Besides, she fancied her husband had caught a glimpse of Lantier from something he had muttered amid a volley of oaths two or three nights before. She was filled with dread lest these two men should meet. She knew Coupeau so well that she had long since discovered that he was still jealous of Lantier, and while the four women discussed the imminent danger of a terrible tragedy the sauces and the meats hissed and simmered on the furnaces, and they ended by each taking a cup of soup to discover what improvement was desirable.

Monday arrived. Now that Gervaise had invited fourteen to dine, she began to be afraid there would not be room and finally decided to lay the table in the shop. She was uncertain how to place the table, which was the ironing table on trestles. In the midst of the hubbub and confusion a customer arrived and made a scene because her linen had not come home on the Friday previous. She insisted on having every piece that moment—clean or dirty, ironed or rough-dry.

Then Gervaise, to excuse herself, told a lie with wonderful *sang-froid*. It was not her fault. She was cleaning her rooms. Her women would be at work again the next day, and she got rid of her customer, who went away soothed by the promise that her wash would be sent to her early the following morning.

But Gervaise lost her temper, which was not a common thing with her, and as soon as the woman's back was turned called her by an opprobrious name and declared that if she did as people wished she could not take time to eat and vowed she would not have an iron heated that day or the next in her establishment. No! Not if the Grand Turk himself should come and entreat

her on his knees to do up a collar for him. She meant to enjoy herself a little occasionally!

The entire morning was consumed in making purchases. Three times did Gervaise go out and come in, laden with bundles. But when she went the fourth time for the wine she discovered that she had not money enough. She could have got the wine on credit, but she could not be without money in the house, for a thousand little unexpected expenses arise at such times, and she and her mother-in-law racked their brains to know what they should do to get the twenty francs they considered necessary. Mme Coupeau, who had once been housekeeper for an actress, was the first to speak of the Mont-de-Piété. Gervaise laughed gaily.

"To be sure! Why had she not thought of it before?"

She folded her black silk dress and pinned it in a napkin; then she hid the bundle under her mother-in-law's apron and bade her keep it very flat, lest the neighbors, who were so terribly inquisitive, should find it out, and then she watched the old woman from the door to see that no one followed her.

But when Mamma Coupeau had gone a few steps Gervaise called her back into the shop and, taking her wedding ring from her finger, said:

"Take this, too, for we shall need all the money we can get today."

And when the old woman came back with twenty-five francs she clapped her hands with joy. She ordered six bottles of wine with seals to drink with the roast. The Lorilleuxs would be green with envy. For a fortnight this had been her idea, to crush the Lorilleuxs, who were never known to ask a friend to their table; who, on the contrary, locked their doors when they had anything special to eat. Gervaise wanted to give her a lesson and would have liked to offer the strangers who passed her door a seat at her table. Money was a very good thing and mighty pretty to look at, but it was good for nothing but to spend.

Mamma Coupeau and Gervaise began to lay their table at three o'clock. They had hung curtains before the windows, but as the day was warm the door into the street was open. The two women did not put on a plate or salt spoon without the avowed intention of worrying the Lorilleuxs. They had given them seats where the table could be seen to the best advantage, and they placed before them the real china plates.

"No, no, Mamma," cried Gervaise, "not those napkins. I have two which are real damask."

"Well! Well! I declare!" murmured the old woman. "What will they say to all this?"

And they smiled as they stood at opposite sides of this long table with its glossy white cloth and its places for fourteen carefully laid. They worshiped there as if it had been a chapel erected in the middle of the shop.

"How false they are!" said Gervaise. "Do you remember how she declared she had lost a piece of one of the chains when she was carrying them home? That was only to get out of giving you your five francs."

"Which I have never had from them but just twice," muttered the old woman.

"I will wager that next month they will invent another tale. That is one reason why they lock their doors when they have a rabbit. They think people might say, 'If you can eat rabbits you can give five francs to your mother!'" How mean they are! What do they think would have become of you if I had not asked you to come and live here?"

Her mother-in-law shook her head. She was rather severe in her judgment of the Lorilleuxs that day, inasmuch as she was influenced by the gorgeous entertainment given by the Coupeaus. She liked the excitement; she liked to cook. She generally lived pretty well with Gervaise, but on those days which occur in all households, when the dinner was scanty and unsatisfactory, she called herself a most unhappy woman, left to the mercy of a daughter-in-law. In the depths of her heart she still loved Mme Lorilleux; she was her eldest child.

"You certainly would have weighed some pounds less with her," continued Gervaise. "No coffee, no tobacco, no sweets. And do you imagine that they would have put two mattresses on your bed?"

"No indeed," answered the old woman, "but I wish to see them when they first come in—just to see how they look!"

At four o'clock the goose was roasted, and Augustine, seated on a little footstool, was given a long-handled spoon and bidden to watch and baste it every few minutes. Gervaise was busy with the peas, and Mamma Coupeau, with her head a little confused, was waiting until it was time to heat the veal and the pork. At five the guests began to arrive. Clémence and Mme Putois, gorgeous to behold in their Sunday rig, were the first.

Clémence wore a blue dress and had some geraniums in her hand; Madame was in black, with a bunch of heliotrope. Gervaise, whose hands were covered with flour, put them behind her back, came forward and kissed them cordially.

After them came Virginie in scarf and hat, though she had only to cross the street; she wore a printed muslin and was as imposing as any lady in the land. She brought a pot of red carnations and put both her arms around her friend and kissed her.

The offering brought by Boche was a pot of pansies, and his wife's was mignonette; Mme Lerat's, a lemon verbena. The three furnaces filled the room with an overpowering heat, and the frying potatoes drowned their voices. Gervaise was very sweet and smiling, thanking everyone for the flowers, at the same time making the dressing for the salad. The perfume of the flowers was perceived above all the smell of cooking.

"Can't I help you?" said Virginie. "It is a shame to have you work so hard for three days on all these things that we shall gobble up in no time."

"No indeed," answered Gervaise; "I am nearly through."

The ladies covered the bed with their shawls and bonnets and then went into the shop that they might be out of the way and talked through the open door with much noise and loud laughing.

At this moment Goujet appeared and stood timidly on the threshold with a tall white rosebush in his arms whose flowers brushed against his yellow beard. Gervaise ran toward him with her cheeks reddened by her furnaces. She took the plant, crying:

"How beautiful!"

He dared not kiss her, and she was compelled to offer her cheek to him, and both were embarrassed. He told her in a confused way that his mother was ill with sciatica and could not come. Gervaise was greatly disappointed, but she had no time to say much just then: she was beginning to be anxious about Coupeau—he ought to be in—then, too, where were the Lorilleuxs? She called Mme Lerat, who had arranged the reconciliation, and bade her go and see.

Mme Lerat put on her hat and shawl with excessive care and departed. A solemn hush of expectation pervaded the room.

Mme Lerat presently reappeared. She had come round by the street to give a more ceremonious aspect to the affair. She held the door open while Mme Lorilleux, in a silk dress, stood on the threshold. All the guests rose, and Gervaise went forward to meet her sister and kissed her, as had been agreed upon.

"Come in! Come in!" she said. "We are friends again."

"And I hope for always," answered her sister-in-law severely.

After she was ushered in the same program had to be followed out with her husband. Neither of the two brought any flowers. They had refused to do so, saying that it would look as if they were bowing down to Wooden Legs. Gervaise summoned Augustine and bade her bring some wine and then filled glasses for all the party, and each drank the health of the family.

"It is a good thing before soup," muttered Boche.

Mamma Coupeau drew Gervaise into the next room.

"Did you see her?" she said eagerly. "I was watching her, and when she saw the table her face was as long as my arm, and now she is gnawing her lips; she is so mad!"

It was true the Lorilleuxs could not stand that table with its white linen, its shining glass and square piece of bread at each place. It was like a restaurant on the boulevard, and Mme Lorilleux felt of the cloth stealthily to ascertain if it were new.

"We are all ready," cried Gervaise, reappearing and pulling down her sleeves over her white arms.

"Where can Coupeau be?" she continued.

"He is always late! He always forgets!" muttered his sister. Gervaise was in despair. Everything would be spoiled. She proposed that someone should go out and look for him. Goujet offered to go, and she said she would accompany him. Virginie followed, all three bareheaded. Everyone looked at them, so gay and fresh on a week-day. Virginie in her pink muslin and Gervaise in a white cambric with blue spots and a gray silk handkerchief knotted round her throat. They went to one wineshop after another, but no Coupeau. Suddenly, as they went toward the boulevard, his wife uttered an exclamation.

"What is the matter?" asked Goujet.

The clearstarcher was very pale and so much agitated that she could hardly stand. Virginie knew at once and, leaning over her, looked in at the restaurant and saw Lantier quietly dining.

"I turned my foot," said Gervaise when she could speak. Finally at the Assom-

moir they found Coupeau and Poisson. They were standing in the center of an excited crowd. Coupeau, in a gray blouse, was quarreling with someone, and Poisson, who was not on duty that day, was listening quietly, his red mustache and imperial giving him, however, quite a formidable aspect.

Goujet left the women outside and, going in, placed his hand on Coupeau's shoulder, who, when he saw his wife and Virginie, fell into a great rage.

No, he would not move! He would not stand being followed about by women in this way! They might go home and eat their rubbishy dinner themselves! He did not want any of it!

To appease him Goujet was compelled to drink with him, and finally he persuaded him to go with him. But when he was outside he said to Gervaise: "I am not going home; you need not think it!"

She did not reply. She was trembling from head to foot. She had been speaking of Lantier to Virginie and begged the other to go on in front, while the two women walked on either side of Coupeau to prevent him from seeing Lantier as they passed the open window where he sat eating his dinner.

But Coupeau knew that Lantier was there, for he said:

"There's a fellow I know, and you know him too!"

He then went on to accuse her, with many a coarse word, of coming out to look, not for him, but for her old lover, and then all at once he poured out a torrent of abuse upon Lantier, who, however, never looked up or appeared to hear it.

Virginie at last coaxed Coupeau on, whose rage disappeared when they turned the corner of the street. They returned to the shop, however, in a very different mood from the one in which they had left it and found the guests, with very long faces, awaiting them.

Coupeau shook hands with the ladies in succession, with difficulty keeping his feet as he did so, and Gervaise, in a choked voice, begged them to take their seats. But suddenly she perceived that Mme Goujet not having come, there was an empty seat next to Mme Lorilleux.

"We are thirteen," she said, much disturbed, as she fancied this to be an additional proof of the misfortune which for some time she had felt to be hanging over them.

The ladies, who were seated, started up. Mme Putois offered to leave because, she said, no one should fly in the face of Destiny; besides, she was not hungry. As to Boche, he laughed, and said it was all nonsense.

"Wait!" cried Gervaise. "I will arrange it."

And rushing out on the sidewalk, she called to Father Bru, who was crossing the street, and the old man followed her into the room.

"Sit there," said the clearstarcher. "You are willing to dine with us, are you not?"

He nodded acquiescence.

"He will do as well as another," she continued in a low voice. "He rarely, if ever, had as much as he wanted to eat, and it will be a pleasure to us to see him enjoy his dinner."

Goujet's eyes were damp, so much was he touched by the kind way in

which Gervaise spoke, and the others felt that it would bring them good luck. Mme Lorilleux was the only one who seemed displeased. She drew her skirts away and looked down with disgusted mien upon the patched blouse at her side.

Gervaise served the soup, and the guests were just lifting their spoons to their mouths when Virginie noticed that Coupeau had disappeared. He had probably returned to the more congenial society at the Assommoir, and someone said he might stay in the street; certainly no one would go after him, but just as they had swallowed the soup Coupeau appeared bearing two pots, one under each arm—a balsam and a wallflower. All the guests clapped their hands. He placed them on either side of Gervaise and, kissing her, he said:

"I forgot you, my dear, but all the same I loved you very much."

"Monsieur Coupeau is very amiable tonight; he has taken just enough to make him good natured," whispered one of the guests.

This little act on the part of the host brought back the smiles to the faces around the table. The wine began to circulate, and the voices of the children were heard in the next room. Etienne, Nana, Pauline and little Victor Fauconnier were installed at a small table and were told to be very good.

When the *blanquette du veau* was served the guests were moved to enthusiasm. It was now half-past seven. The door of the shop was shut to keep out inquisitive eyes, and curtains hung before the windows. The veal was a great success; the sauce was delicious and the mushrooms extraordinarily good. Then came the sparerib of pork. Of course all these good things demanded a large amount of wine.

In the next room at the children's table Nana was playing the mistress of the household. She was seated at the head of the table and for a while was quite dignified, but her natural gluttony made her forget her good manners when she saw Augustine stealing the peas from the plate, and she slapped the girl vehemently.

"Take care, mademoiselle," said Augustine sulkily, "or I will tell your mother that I heard you ask Victor to kiss you."

Now was the time for the goose. Two lamps were placed on the table, one at each end, and the disorder was very apparent: the cloth was stained and spotted. Gervaise left the table to reappear presently, bearing the goose in triumph. Lorilleux and his wife exchanged a look of dismay.

"Who will cut it?" said the clearstarcher. "No, not I. It is too big for me to manage!"

Coupeau said he could do it. After all, it was a simple thing enough—he should just tear it to pieces.

There was a cry of dismay.

Mme Lerat had an inspiration.

"Monsieur Poisson is the man," she said; "of course he understands the use of arms." And she handed the sergeant the carving knife. Poisson made a stiff inclination of his whole body and drew the dish toward him and went to work in a slow, methodical fashion. As he thrust his knife into the breast Lorilleux was seized with momentary patriotism, and he exclaimed:

"If it were only a Cossack!"

At last the goose was carved and distributed, and the whole party ate as if they were just beginning their dinner. Presently there was a grand outcry about the heat, and Coupeau opened the door into the street. Gervaise devoured large slices of the breast, hardly speaking, but a little ashamed of her own gluttony in the presence of Goujet. She never forgot old Bru, however, and gave him the choicest morsels, which he swallowed unconsciously, his palate having long since lost the power of distinguishing flavors. Mamma Coupeau picked a bone with her two remaining teeth.

And the wine! Good heavens, how much they drank! A pile of empty bottles stood in the corner. When Mme Putois asked for water Coupeau himself removed the carafes from the table. No one should drink water, he declared, in his house—did she want to swallow frogs and live things?—and he filled up all the glasses. Hypocrites might talk as much as they pleased; the juice of the grape was a mighty good thing and a famous invention!

The guests all laughed and approved; working people must have their wine, they said, and Father Noah had planted the vine for them especially. Wine gave courage and strength for work; and if it chanced that a man sometimes took a drop too much, in the end it did him no harm, and life looked brighter to him for a time. Goujet himself, who was usually so prudent and abstemious, was becoming a little excited. Boche was growing red, and the Lorilleux pair very pale, while Poisson assumed a solemn and severe aspect. The men were all more or less tipsy, and the ladies—well, the less we say of the ladies, the better.

Suddenly Gervaise remembered the six bottles of sealed wine she had omitted to serve with the goose as she had intended. She produced them amid much applause. The glasses were filled anew, and Poisson rose and proposed the health of their hostess.

"And fifty more birthdays!" cried Virginie.

"No, no," answered Gervaise with a smile that had a touch of sadness in it. "I do not care to live to be very old. There comes a time when one is glad to go!"

A little crowd had collected outside and smiled at the scene, and the smell of the goose pervaded the whole street. The clerks in the grocery opposite licked their lips and said it was good and curiously estimated the amount of wine that had been consumed.

None of the guests were annoyed by being the subjects of observation, although they were fully aware of it and, in fact, rather enjoyed it. Coupeau, catching sight of a familiar face, held up a bottle, which, being accepted with a nod, he sent it out with a glass. This established a sort of fraternity with the street.

In the next room the children were unmanageable. They had taken possession of a saucepan and were drumming on it with spoons. Mamma Coupeau and Father Bru were talking earnestly. The old man was speaking of his two sons who had died in the Crimea. Ah, had they but lived, he would have had bread to eat in his old age!

Mme Coupeau, whose tongue was a little thick, said:

"Yes, but one has a good deal of unhappiness with children. Many an hour have I wept on account of mine."

Father Bru hardly heard what she said but talked on, half to himself.

"I can't get any work to do. I am too old. When I ask for any people laugh and ask if it was I who blacked Henri Quatre's boots. Last year I earned thirty sous by painting a bridge. I had to lie on my back all the time, close to the water, and since then I have coughed incessantly." He looked down at his poor stiff hands and added, "I know I am good for nothing. I wish I was by the side of my boys. It is a great pity that one can't kill one's self when one begins to grow old."

"Really," said Lorilleux, "I cannot see why the government does not do something for people in your condition. Men who are disabled—"

"But workmen are not soldiers," interrupted Poisson, who considered it his duty to espouse the cause of the government. "It is foolish to expect them to do impossibilities."

The dessert was served. In the center was a pyramid of spongecake in the form of a temple with melonlike sides, and on the top was an artificial rose with a butterfly of silver paper hovering over it, held by a gilt wire. Two drops of gum in the heart of the rose stood for dew. On the left was a deep plate with a bit of cheese, and on the other side of the pyramid was a dish of strawberries, which had been sugared and carefully crushed.

In the salad dish there were a few leaves of lettuce left.

"Madame Boche," said Gervaise courteously, "pray eat these. I know how fond you are of salad."

The concierge shook her head. There were limits even to her capacities, and she looked at the lettuce with regret. Clémence told how she had once eaten three quarts of water cresses at her breakfast. Mme Putois declared that she enjoyed lettuce with a pinch of salt and no dressing, and as they talked the ladies emptied the salad bowl.

None of the guests were dismayed at the dessert, although they had eaten so enormously. They had the night before them too; there was no need of haste. The men lit their pipes and drank more wine while they watched Gervaise cut the cake. Poisson, who prided himself on his knowledge of the habits of good society, rose and took the rose from the top and presented it to the hostess amid the loud applause of the whole party. She fastened it just over her heart, and the butterfly fluttered at every movement. A song was proposed—comic songs were a specialty with Boche—and the whole party joined in the chorus. The men kept time with their heels and the women with their knives on their glasses. The windows of the shop jarred with the noise. Virginie had disappeared twice, and the third time, when she came back, she said to Gervaise:

"My dear, he is still at the restaurant and pretends to be reading his paper. I fear he is meditating some mischief."

She spoke of Lantier. She had been out to see if he were anywhere in the vicinity. Gervaise became very grave.

"Is he tipsy?" she asked.

"No indeed, and that is what troubled me. Why on earth should he stay there so long if he is not drinking? My heart is in my mouth; I am so afraid something will happen."

The clearstarcher begged her to say no more. Mme Putois started up and began a fierce piratical song, standing stiff and erect in her black dress, her pale face surrounded by her black lace cap, and gesticulating violently. Poisson nodded approval. He had been to sea, and he knew all about it.

Gervaise, assisted by her mother-in-law, now poured out the coffee. Her guests insisted on a song from her, declaring that it was her turn. She refused. Her face was disturbed and pale, so much so that she was asked if the goose disagreed with her.

Finally she began to sing a plaintive melody all about dreams and rest. Her eyelids half closed as she ended, and she peered out into the darkness. Then followed a barcarole from Mme Boche and a romance from Lorilleux, in which figured perfumes of Araby, ivory throats, ebony hair, kisses, moonlight and guitars! Clémence followed with a song which recalled the country with its descriptions of birds and flowers. Virginie brought down the house with her imitation of a vivandière, standing with her hand on her hip and a wineglass in her hand, which she emptied down her throat as she finished.

But the grand success of the evening was Goujet, who sang in his rich bass the "*Adieux d'Abd-el-Kader*." The words issued from his yellow beard like the call of a trumpet and thrilled everyone around the table.

Virginie whispered to Gervaise:

"I have just seen Lantier pass the door. Good heavens! There he is again, standing still and looking in."

Gervaise caught her breath and timidly turned around. The crowd had increased, attracted by the songs. There were soldiers and shopkeepers and three little girls, five or six years old, holding each other by the hand, grave and silent, struck with wonder and admiration.

Lantier was directly in front of the door. Gervaise met his eyes and felt the very marrow of her bones chilled; she could not move hand or foot.

Coupeau called for more wine, and Clémence helped herself to more strawberries. The singing ceased, and the conversation turned upon a woman who had hanged herself the day before in the next street.

It was now Mme Lerat's turn to amuse the company, but she needed to make certain preparations.

She dipped the corner of her napkin into a glass of water and applied it to her temples because she was too warm. Then she asked for a teaspoonful of brandy and wiped her lips.

"I will sing '*L'Enfant du Bon Dieu*,'" she said pompously.

She stood up, with her square shoulders like those of a man, and began:

*"L'Enfant perdu que sa mère abandonne,
Trouve toujours un asile au Saint lieu,
Dieu qui le voit, le défend de son trône,
L'Enfant perdu, c'est L'Enfant du bon Dieu."*

She raised her eyes to heaven and placed one hand on her heart; her voice was not without a certain sympathetic quality, and Gervaise, already quivering with emotion caused by the knowledge of Lantier's presence, could no longer restrain her tears. It seemed to her that she was the deserted child whom *le bon Dieu* had taken under His care. Clémence, who was quite tipsy, burst into loud sobs. The ladies took out their handkerchiefs and pressed them to their eyes, rather proud of their tenderness of heart.

The men felt it their duty to respect the feeling shown by the women and were, in fact, somewhat touched themselves. The wine had softened their hearts apparently.

Gervaise and Virginie watched the shadows outside. Mme Boche, in her turn, now caught a glimpse of Lantier and uttered an exclamation as she wiped away her fast-falling tears. The three women exchanged terrified, anxious glances.

"Good heavens!" muttered Virginie. "Suppose Coupeau should turn around. There would be a murder, I am convinced." And the earnestness of their fixed eyes became so apparent that finally he said:

"What are you staring at?"

And leaning forward, he, too, saw Lantier.

"This is too much," he muttered, "the dirty ruffian! It is too much, and I won't have it!"

As he started to his feet with an oath, Gervaise put her hand on his arm imploringly.

"Put down that knife," she said, "and do not go out, I entreat of you."

Virginie took away the knife that Coupeau had snatched from the table, but she could not prevent him from going into the street. The other guests saw nothing, so entirely absorbed were they in the touching words which Mme Lerat was still singing.

Gervaise sat with her hands clasped convulsively, breathless with fear, expecting to hear a cry of rage from the street and see one of the two men fall to the ground. Virginie and Mme Boche had something of the same feeling. Coupeau had been so overcome by the fresh air that when he rushed forward to take Lantier by the collar he missed his footing and found himself seated quietly in the gutter.

Lantier moved aside a little without taking his hands from his pockets.

Coupeau staggered to his feet again, and a violent quarrel commenced. Gervaise pressed her hands over her eyes; suddenly all was quiet, and she opened her eyes again and looked out.

To her intense astonishment she saw Lantier and her husband talking in a quiet, friendly manner.

Gervaise exchanged a look with Mme Boche and Virginie. What did this mean?

As the women watched them the two men began to walk up and down in front of the shop. They were talking earnestly. Coupeau seemed to be urging something, and Lantier refusing. Finally Coupeau took Lantier's arm and almost dragged him toward the shop.

"I tell you, you must!" he cried. "You shall drink a glass of wine with us. Men will be men all the world over. My wife and I know that perfectly well."

Mme Lerat had finished her song and seated herself with the air of being utterly exhausted. She asked for a glass of wine. When she sang that song, she said, she was always torn to pieces, and it left her nerves in a terrible state.

Lantier had been placed at the table by Coupeau and was eating a piece of cake, leisurely dipping it into his glass of wine. With the exception of Mme Boche and Virginie, no one knew him.

The Lorilleuxs looked at him with some suspicion, which, however, was very far from the mark. An awkward silence followed, broken by Coupeau, who said simply:

"He is a friend of ours!"

And turning to his wife, he added:

"Can't you move round a little? Perhaps there is a cup of hot coffee!"

Gervaise looked from one to the other. She was literally dazed. When her husband first appeared with her former lover she had clasped her hands over her forehead with that instinctive gesture with which in a great storm one waits for the approach of the thunderclap.

It did not seem possible that the walls would not fall and crush them all. Then seeing the two men calmly seated together, it all at once seemed perfectly natural to her. She was tired of thinking about it and preferred to accept it. Why, after all, should she worry? No one else did. Everyone seemed to be satisfied; why should not she be also?

The children had fallen asleep in the back room, Pauline with her head on Etienne's shoulder. Gervaise started as her eyes fell on her boy. She was shocked at the thought of his father sitting there eating cake without showing the least desire to see his child. She longed to awaken him and show him to Lantier. And then again she had a feeling of passing wonder at the manner in which things settled themselves in this world.

She would not disturb the serenity of matters now, so she brought in the coffeepot and poured out a cup for Lantier, who received it without even looking up at her as he murmured his thanks.

"Now it is my turn to sing!" shouted Coupeau.

His song was one familiar to them all and even to the street, for the little crowd at the door joined in the chorus. The guests within were all more or less tipsy, and there was so much noise that the policemen ran to quell a riot, but when they saw Poisson they bowed respectfully and passed on.

No one of the party ever knew how or at what hour the festivities terminated. It must have been very late, for there was not a human being in the street when they departed. They vaguely remembered having joined hands and danced around the table. Gervaise remembered that Lantier was the last to leave, that he passed her as she stood in the doorway. She felt a breath on her cheek, but whether it was his or the night air she could not tell.

Mme Lerat had refused to return to Batignolles so late, and a mattress was laid on the floor in the shop near the table. She slept there amid the debris of the feast, and a neighbor's cat profited by an open window to establish herself

by her side, where she crunched the bones of the goose all night between her fine, sharp teeth.

CHAPTER VIII

AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE

THE FOLLOWING SATURDAY Coupeau, who had not been home to dinner, came in with Lantier about ten o'clock. They had been eating pigs' feet at a restaurant at Montmartre.

"Don't scold, wife," said Coupeau; "we have not been drinking, you see; we can walk perfectly straight." And he went on to say how they had met each other quite by accident in the street and how Lantier had refused to drink with him, saying that when a man had married a nice little woman he had no business to throw away his money in that way. Gervaise listened with a faint smile; she had no idea of scolding. Oh no, it was not worth the trouble, but she was much agitated at seeing the two men together so soon again, and with trembling hands she knotted up her loosened hair.

Her workwomen had been gone some time. Nana and Mamma Coupeau were in bed, and Gervaise, who was just closing her shutters when her husband appeared, brought out some glasses and the remains of a bottle of brandy. Lantier did not sit down and avoided addressing her directly.

When she served him, however, he exclaimed:

"A drop, madame; a mere drop!"

Coupeau looked at them for a moment and then expressed his mind fully. They were no fools, he said, nor were they children. The past was the past. If people kept up their enmities for nine or ten years no one would have a soul to speak to soon. As for himself, he was made differently. He knew they were honest people, and he was sure he could trust them.

"Of course," murmured Gervaise, hardly knowing what she said, "of course."

"I regard her as a sister," said Lantier, "only as a sister."

"Give us your hand on that," cried Coupeau, "and let us be good friends in the future. After all, a good heart is better than gold, and I estimate friendship as above all price."

And he gave himself a little tap on his breast and looked about for applause, as if he had uttered rather a noble sentiment.

Then the three silently drank their brandy. Gervaise looked at Lantier and saw him for the first time, for on the night of the fete she had seen him, as it were, through a glass, darkly.

He had grown very stout, and his arms and legs very heavy. But his face was still handsome, although somewhat bloated by liquor and good living. He was dressed with care and did not look any older than his years. He was thirty-five. He wore gray pantaloons and a dark blue frock coat, like any gentleman, and had a watch and a chain on which hung a ring—a souvenir, apparently.

"I must go," he said presently.

He was at the door when Coupeau recalled him to say that he must never pass without coming in to say, "How do you do?"

Meanwhile Gervaise, who had disappeared, returned, pushing Etienne before her. The boy was half asleep but smiled as he rubbed his eyes. When he saw Lantier he stared and looked uneasily from him to Coupeau.

"Do you know this gentleman?" said his mother.

The child looked away and did not answer, but when his mother repeated the question he made a little sign that he remembered him. Lantier, grave and silent, stood still. When Etienne went toward him he stooped and kissed the child, who did not look at him but burst into tears, and when he was violently reproached by Coupeau he rushed away.

"It is excitement," said his mother, who was herself very pale.

"He is usually very good and very obedient," said Coupeau. "I have brought him up well, as you will find out. He will soon get used to you. He must learn something of life, you see, and will understand one of these days that people must forget and forgive, and I would cut off my head sooner than prevent a father from seeing his child!"

He then proposed to finish the bottle of brandy. They all three drank together again. Lantier was quite undisturbed, and before he left he insisted on aiding Coupeau to shut up the shop. Then as he dusted his hands with his handkerchief he wished them a careless good night.

"Sleep well. I am going to try and catch the omnibus. I will see you soon again."

Lantier kept his word and was seen from that time very often in the shop. He came only when Coupeau was home and asked for him before he crossed the threshold. Then seated near the window, always wearing a frock coat, fresh linen and carefully shaved, he kept up a conversation like a man who had seen something of the world. By degrees Coupeau learned something of his life. For the last eight years he had been at the head of a hat manufactory, and when he was asked why he had given it up he said vaguely that he was not satisfied with his partner; he was a rascal, and so on.

But his former position still imparted to him a certain air of importance. He said, also, that he was on the point of concluding an important matter—that certain business houses were in process of establishing themselves, the management of which would be virtually in his hands. In the meantime he had absolutely not one thing to do but to walk about with his hands in his pockets.

Any day he pleased, however, he could start again. He had only to decide on some house. Coupeau did not altogether believe this tale and insisted that he must be doing something which he did not choose to tell; otherwise how did he live?

The truth was that Lantier, excessively talkative in regard to other people's affairs, was very reticent about his own. He lied quite as often as he spoke the truth and would never tell where he resided. He said he was never at home, so it was of no use for anyone to come and see him.

"I am very careful," he said, "in making an engagement. I do not choose to bind myself to a man and find, when it is too late, that he intends to make a

slave of me. I went one Monday to Champion at Monrouge. That evening Champion began a political discussion. He and I differed entirely, and on Tuesday I threw up the situation. You can't blame me, I am sure, for not being willing to sell my soul and my convictions for seven francs per day!"

It was now November. Lantier occasionally brought a bunch of violets to Gervaise. By degrees his visits became more frequent. He seemed determined to fascinate the whole house, even the *Quartier*, and he began by ingratiating himself with Clémence and Mme Putois, showing them both the greatest possible attention.

These two women adored him at the end of a month. Mme Boche, whom he flattered by calling on her in her loge, had all sorts of pleasant things to say about him.

As to the Lorilleuxs, they were furious when they found out who he was and declared that it was a sin and a disgrace for Gervaise to bring him into her house. But one fine day Lantier bearded them in their den and ordered a chain made for a lady of his acquaintance and made himself so agreeable that they begged him to sit down and kept him an hour. After this visit they expressed their astonishment that a man so distinguished could ever have seen anything in Wooden Legs to admire. By degrees, therefore, people had become accustomed to seeing him and no longer expressed their horror or amazement. Goujet was the only one who was disturbed. If Lantier came in while he was there he at once departed and avoided all intercourse with him.

Gervaise was very unhappy. She was conscious of a returning inclination for Lantier, and she was afraid of herself and of him. She thought of him constantly; he had taken entire possession of her imagination. But she grew calmer as days passed on, finding that he never tried to see her alone and that he rarely looked at her and never laid the tip of his finger on her.

Virginie, who seemed to read her through and through, asked her what she feared. Was there ever a man more respectful?

But out of mischief or worse, the woman contrived to get the two into a corner one day and then led the conversation into a most dangerous direction. Lantier, in reply to some question, said in measured tones that his heart was dead, that he lived now only for his son. He never thought of Claude, who was away. He embraced Etienne every night but soon forgot he was in the room and amused himself with Clémence.

Then Gervaise began to realize that the past was dead. Lantier had brought back to her the memory of Plassans and the Hôtel Boncœur. But this faded away again, and, seeing him constantly, the past was absorbed in the present. She shook off these memories almost with disgust. Yes, it was all over, and should he ever dare to allude to former years she would complain to her husband.

She began again to think of Goujet almost unconsciously.

One morning Clémence said that the night before she had seen Lantier walking with a woman who had his arm. Yes, he was coming up La Rue Notre-Dame de Lorette; the woman was a blonde and no better than she should be. Clémence added that she had followed them until the woman reached a house

where she went in. Lantier waited in the street until there was a window opened, which was evidently a signal, for he went into the house at once.

Gervaise was ironing a white dress; she smiled slightly and said that she believed a Provençal was always crazy after women, and at night when Lantier appeared she was quite amused at Clémence, who at once attacked him. He seemed to be, on the whole, rather pleased that he had been seen. The person was an old friend, he said, one whom he had not seen for some time—a very stylish woman, in fact—and he told Clémence to smell of his handkerchief on which his friend had put some of the perfume she used. Just then Etienne came in, and his father became very grave and said that he was in jest—that his heart was dead.

Gervaise nodded approval of this sentiment, but she did not speak.

When spring came Lantier began to talk of moving into that neighborhood. He wanted a furnished, clean room. Mme Boche and Gervaise tried to find one for him. But they did not meet with any success. He was altogether too fastidious in his requirements. Every evening at the Coupeaus' he wished he could find people like themselves who would take a lodger.

"You are very comfortable here, I am sure," he would say regularly.

Finally one night when he had uttered this phrase, as usual, Coupeau cried out:

"If you like this place so much why don't you stay here? We can make room for you."

And he explained that the linen room could be so arranged that it would be very comfortable, and Etienne could sleep on a mattress in the corner.

"No, no," said Lantier; "it would trouble you too much. I know that you have the most generous heart in the world, but I cannot impose upon you. Your room would be a passageway to mine, and that would not be agreeable to any of us."

"Nonsense," said Coupeau. "Have we no invention? There are two windows; can't one be cut down to the floor and used as a door? In that case you would enter from the court and not through the shop. You would be by yourself, and we by ourselves."

There was a long silence, broken finally by Lantier.

"If this could be done," he said, "I should like it, but I am afraid you would find yourselves too crowded."

He did not look at Gervaise as he spoke, but it was clear that he was only waiting for a word from her. She did not like the plan at all; not that the thought of Lantier living under their roof disturbed her, but she had no idea where she could put the linen as it came in to be washed and again when it was rough-dry.

But Coupeau was enchanted with the plan. The rent, he said, had always been heavy to carry, and now they would gain twenty francs per month. It was not dear for him, and it would help them decidedly. He told his wife that she could have two great boxes made in which all the linen of the *Quartier* could be piled.

Gervaise still hesitated, questioning Mamma Coupeau with her eyes. Lantier

had long since propitiated the old lady by bringing her gumdrops for her cough.

"If we could arrange it I am sure—" said Gervaise hesitatingly.

"You are too kind," remonstrated Lantier. "I really feel that it would be an intrusion."

Coupeau flamed out. Why did she not speak up, he should like to know? Instead of stammering and behaving like a fool?

"Etienne! Etienne!" he shouted.

The boy was asleep with his head on the table. He started up.

"Listen to me. Say to this gentleman, 'I wish it.' Say just those words and nothing more."

"I wish it!" stammered Etienne, half asleep.

Everybody laughed. But Lantier almost instantly resumed his solemn air. He pressed Coupeau's hand cordially.

"I accept your proposition," he said. "It is a most friendly one, and I thank you in my name and in that of my child."

The next morning Marescot, the owner of the house, happening to call, Gervaise spoke to him of the matter. At first he absolutely refused and was as disturbed and angry as if she had asked him to build on a wing for her especial accommodation. Then after a minute examination of the premises he ended by giving his consent, only on condition, however, that he should not be required to pay any portion of the expense, and the Coupeaus signed a paper, agreeing to put everything into its original condition at the expiration of their lease.

That same evening Coupeau brought in a mason, a painter and a carpenter, all friends and boon companions of his, who would do this little job at night, after their day's work was over.

The cutting of the door, the painting and the cleaning would come to about one hundred francs, and Coupeau agreed to pay them as fast as his tenant paid him.

The next question was how to furnish the room? Gervaise left Mamma Coupeau's wardrobe in it. She added a table and two chairs from her own room. She was compelled to buy a bed and dressing table and divers other things, which amounted to one hundred and thirty francs. This she must pay for ten francs each month. So that for nearly a year they could derive no benefit from their new lodger.

It was early in June that Lantier took possession of his new quarters. Coupeau had offered the night before to help him with his trunk in order to avoid the thirty sous for a fiacre. But the other seemed embarrassed and said his trunk was heavy, and it seemed as if he preferred to keep it a secret even now where he resided.

He came about three o'clock. Coupeau was not there, and Gervaise, standing at her shop door, turned white as she recognized the trunk on the fiacre. It was their old one with which they had traveled from Plassans. Now it was banged and battered and strapped with cords.

She saw it brought in as she had often seen it in her dreams, and she vaguely

wondered if it were the same fiacre which had taken him and Adèle away. Boche welcomed Lantier cordially. Gervaise stood by in silent bewilderment, watching them place the trunk in her lodger's room. Then hardly knowing what she said, she murmured:

"We must take a glass of wine together——"

Lantier, who was busy untying the cords on his trunk, did not look up, and she added:

"You will join us, Monsieur Boche!"

And she went for some wine and glasses. At that moment she caught sight of Poisson passing the door. She gave him a nod and a wink which he perfectly understood: it meant, when he was on duty, that he was offered a glass of wine. He went round by the courtyard in order not to be seen. Lantier never saw him without some joke in regard to his political convictions, which, however, had not prevented the men from becoming excellent friends.

To one of these jests Boche now replied:

"Did you know," he said, "that when the emperor was in London he was a policeman, and his special duty was to carry all the intoxicated women to the station house?"

Gervaise had filled three glasses on the table. She did not care for any wine; she was sick at heart as she stood looking at Lantier kneeling on the floor by the side of the trunk. She was wild to know what it contained. She remembered that in one corner was a pile of stockings, a shirt or two and an old hat. Were those things still there? Was she to be confronted with those tattered relics of the past?

Lantier did not lift the lid, however; he rose and, going to the table, held his glass high in his hands.

"To your health, madame!" he said.

And Poisson and Boche drank with him.

Gervaise filled their glasses again. The three men wiped their lips with the backs of their hands.

Then Lantier opened his trunk. It was filled with a hodgepodge of papers, books, old clothes and bundles of linen. He pulled out a saucepan, then a pair of boots, followed by a bust of Ledru Rollin with a broken nose, then an embroidered shirt and a pair of ragged pantaloons, and Gervaise perceived a mingled and odious smell of tobacco, leather and dust.

No, the old hat was not in the left corner; in its place was a pin cushion, the gift of some woman. All at once the strange anxiety with which she had watched the opening of this trunk disappeared, and in its place came an intense sadness as she followed each article with her eyes as Lantier took them out and wondered which belonged to her time and which to the days when another woman filled his life.

"Look here, Poisson," cried Lantier, pulling out a small book. It was a scurrilous attack on the emperor, printed at Brussels, entitled *The Amours of Napoleon III.*

Poisson was aghast. He found no words with which to defend the emperor. It was in a book—of course, therefore, it was true. Lantier, with a laugh of

triumph, turned away and began to pile up his books and papers, grumbling a little that there were no shelves on which to put them. Gervaise promised to buy some for him. He owned Louis Blanc's *Histoire de Dix Ans*, all but the first volume, which he had never had, Lamartine's *Les Girondins*, *The Mysteries of Paris* and *The Wandering Jew*, by Eugène Sue, without counting a pile of incendiary volumes which he had picked up at bookstalls. His old newspapers he regarded with especial respect. He had collected them with care for years: whenever he had read an article at a café of which he approved, he bought the journal and preserved it. He consequently had an enormous quantity, of all dates and names, tied together without order or sequence.

He laid them all in a corner of the room, saying as he did so:

"If people would study those sheets and adopt the ideas therein, society would be far better organized than it now is. Your emperor and all his minions would come down a bit on the ladder——"

Here he was interrupted by Poisson, whose red imperial and mustache irradiated his pale face.

"And the army," he said, "what would you do with that?"

Lantier became very much excited.

"The army!" he cried. "I would scatter it to the four winds of heaven! I want the military system of the country abolished! I want the abolition of titles and monopolies! I want salaries equalized! I want liberty for everyone. Divorces, too——"

"Yes; divorces, of course," interposed Boche. "That is needed in the cause of morality."

Poisson threw back his head, ready for an argument, but Gervaise, who did not like discussions, interfered. She had recovered from the torpor into which she had been plunged by the sight of this trunk, and she asked the men to take another glass. Lantier was suddenly subdued and drank his wine, but Boche looked at Poisson uneasily.

"All this talk is between ourselves, is it not?" he said to the policeman.

Poisson did not allow him to finish: he laid his hand on his heart and declared that he was no spy. Their words went in at one ear and out at another. He had forgotten them already.

Coupeau by this time appeared, and more wine was sent for. But Poisson dared linger no longer, and, stiff and haughty, he departed through the courtyard.

From the very first Lantier was made thoroughly at home. Lantier had his separate room, private entrance and key. But he went through the shop almost always. The accumulation of linen disturbed Gervaise, for her husband never arranged the boxes he had promised, and she was obliged to stow it away in all sorts of places, under the bed and in the corner. She did not like making up Etienne's mattress late at night either.

Goujet had spoken of sending the child to Lille to his own old master, who wanted apprentices. The plan pleased her, particularly as the boy, who was not very happy at home, was impatient to become his own master. But she dared not ask Lantier, who had come there to live ostensibly to be near his

son. She felt, therefore, that it was hardly a good plan to send the boy away within a couple of weeks after his father's arrival.

When, however, she did make up her mind to approach the subject he expressed warm approval of the idea, saying that youths were far better in the country than in Paris.

Finally it was decided that Etienne should go, and when the morning of his departure arrived Lantier read his son a long lecture and then sent him off, and the house settled down into new habits.

Gervaise became accustomed to seeing the dirty linen lying about and to seeing Lantier coming in and going out. He still talked with an important air of his business operations. He went out daily, dressed with the utmost care and came home, declaring that he was worn out with the discussions in which he had been engaged and which involved the gravest and most important interests.

He rose about ten o'clock, took a walk if the day pleased him, and if it rained he sat in the shop and read his paper. He liked to be there. It was his delight to live surrounded by a circle of worshipping women, and he basked indolently in the warmth and atmosphere of ease and comfort, which characterized the place.

At first Lantier took his meals at the restaurant at the corner, but after a while he dined three or four times a week with the Coupeaus and finally requested permission to board with them and agreed to pay them fifteen francs each Saturday. Thus he was regularly installed and was one of the family. He was seen in his shirt sleeves in the shop every morning, attending to any little matters or receiving orders from the customers. He induced Gervaise to leave her own wine merchant and go to a friend of his own. Then he found fault with the bread and sent Augustine to the Vienna bakery in a distant *faubourg*. He changed the grocer but kept the butcher on account of his political opinions.

At the end of a month he had instituted a change in the cuisine. Everything was cooked in oil: being a Provençal, that was what he adored. He made the omelets himself, which were as tough as leather. He superintended Mamma Coupeau and insisted that the beefsteaks should be thoroughly cooked, until they were like the soles of an old shoe. He watched the salad to see that nothing went in which he did not like. His favorite dish was vermicelli, into which he poured half a bottle of oil. This he and Gervaise ate together, for the others, being Parisians, could not be induced to taste it.

By degrees Lantier attended to all those affairs which fall to the share of the master of the house and to various details of their business, in addition. He insisted that if the five francs which the Lorilleux people had agreed to pay toward the support of Mamma Coupeau was not forthcoming they should go to law about it. In fact, ten francs was what they ought to pay. He himself would go and see if he could not make them agree to that. He went up at once and asked them in such a way that he returned in triumph with the ten francs. And Mme Lerat, too, did the same at his representation. Mamma Coupeau could have kissed Lantier's hands, who played the part, besides, of an arbiter in the quarrels between the old woman and Gervaise.

The latter, as was natural, sometimes lost patience with the old woman, who

retreated to her bed to weep. He would bluster about and ask if they were simpletons, to amuse people with their disagreements, and finally induced them to kiss and be friends once more.

He expressed his mind freely in regard to Nana also. In his opinion she was brought up very badly, and here he was quite right, for when her father cuffed her her mother upheld her, and when, in her turn, the mother reprov'd, the father made a scene.

Nana was delighted at this and felt herself free to do much as she pleased.

She had started a new game at the farriery opposite. She spent entire days swinging on the shafts of the wagons. She concealed herself, with her troop of followers, at the back of the dark court, redly lit by the forge, and then would make sudden rushes with screams and whoops, followed by every child in the neighborhood, reminding one of a flock of martins or sparrows.

Lantier was the only one whose scoldings had any effect. She listened to him graciously. This child of ten years of age, precocious and vicious, coquetted with him as if she had been a grown woman. He finally assumed the care of her education. He taught her to dance and to talk slang!

Thus a year passed away. The whole neighborhood supposed Lantier to be a man of means—otherwise how did the Coupeaus live as they did? Gervaise, to be sure, still made money, but she supported two men who did nothing, and the shop, of course, did not make enough for that. The truth was that Lantier had never paid one sou, either for board or lodging. He said he would let it run on, and when it amounted to a good sum he would pay it all at once.

After that Gervaise never dared to ask him for a centime. She got bread, wine and meat on credit; bills were running up everywhere, for their expenditures amounted to three and four francs every day. She had never paid anything, even a trifle on account, to the man from whom she had bought her furniture or to Coupeau's three friends who had done the work in Lantier's room. The tradespeople were beginning to grumble and treated her with less politeness.

But she seemed to be insensible to this; she chose the most expensive things, having thrown economy to the winds, since she had given up paying for things at once. She always intended, however, to pay eventually and had a vague notion of earning hundreds of francs daily in some extraordinary way by which she could pay all these people.

About the middle of summer Clémence departed, for there was not enough work for two women; she had waited for her money for some weeks. Lantier and Coupeau were quite undisturbed, however. They were in the best of spirits and seemed to be growing fat over the ruined business.

In the *Quartier* there was a vast deal of gossip. Everybody wondered as to the terms on which Lantier and Gervaise now stood. The Lorilleuxs viciously declared that Gervaise would be glad enough to resume her old relations with Lantier but that he would have nothing to do with her, for she had grown old and ugly. The Boche people took a different view, but while everyone declared that the whole arrangement was a most improper one, they finally accepted it as quite a matter of course and altogether natural.

It is quite possible there were other homes which were quite as open to invidious remarks within a stone's throw, but these Coupeaus, as their neighbors said, were good, kind people. Lantier was especially ingratiating. It was decided, therefore, to let things go their own way undisturbed.

Gervaise lived quietly indifferent to, and possibly entirely unsuspecting of, all these scandals. By and by it came to pass that her husband's own people looked on her as utterly heartless. Mme Lerat made her appearance every evening, and she treated Lantier as if he were utterly irresistible, into whose arms any and every woman would be only too glad to fall. An actual league seemed to be forming against Gervaise: all the women insisted on giving her a lover.

But she saw none of these fascinations in him. He had changed, unquestionably, and the external changes were all in his favor. He wore a frock coat and had acquired a certain polish. But she who knew him so well looked down into his soul through his eyes and shuddered at much she saw there. She could not understand what others saw in him to admire. And she said so one day to Virginie. Then Mme Lerat and Virginie vied with each other in the stories they told of Clémence and himself—what they did and said whenever her back was turned—and now they were sure, since she had left the establishment, that he went regularly to see her.

"Well, what of it?" asked Gervaise, her voice trembling. "What have I to do with that?"

But she looked into Virginie's dark brown eyes, which were specked with gold and emitted sparks as do those of cats. But the woman put on a stupid look as she answered:

"Why, nothing, of course; only I should think you would advise him not to have anything to do with such a person."

Lantier was gradually changing his manner to Gervaise. Now when he shook hands with her he held her fingers longer than was necessary. He watched her incessantly and fixed his bold eyes upon her. He leaned over her so closely that she felt his breath on her cheek. But one evening, being alone with her, he caught her in both arms. At that moment Goujet entered. Gervaise wrenched herself free, and the three exchanged a few words as if nothing had happened. Goujet was very pale and seemed embarrassed, supposing that he had intruded upon them and that she had pushed Lantier aside only because she did not choose to be embraced in public.

The next day Gervaise was miserable, unhappy and restless. She could not iron a handkerchief. She wanted to see Goujet and tell him just what had happened, but ever since Etienne had gone to Lille she had given up going to the forge, as she was quite unable to face the knowing winks with which his comrades received her. But this day she determined to go, and, taking an empty basket on her arms, she started off, pretending that she was going with skirts to some customers in La Rue des Portes-Blanches.

Goujet seemed to be expecting her, for she met him loitering on the corner.

"Ah," he said with a wan smile, "you are going home, I presume?"

He hardly knew what he was saying, and they both turned toward Montmartre without another word. They merely wished to go away from the forge.

They passed several manufactories and soon found themselves with an open field before them. A goat was tethered near by and bleating as it browsed, and a dead tree was crumbling away in the hot sun.

"One might almost think oneself in the country," murmured Gervaise.

They took a seat under the dead tree. The clearstarcher set the basket down at her feet. Before them stretched the heights of Montmartre, with its rows of yellow and gray houses amid clumps of trees, and when they threw back their heads a little they saw the whole sky above, clear and cloudless, but the sunlight dazzled them, and they looked over to the misty outlines of the *faubourg* and watched the smoke rising from tall chimneys in regular puffs, indicating the machinery which impelled it. These great sighs seemed to relieve their own oppressed breasts.

"Yes," said Gervaise after a long silence. "I have been on a long walk, and I came out——"

She stopped. After having been so eager for an explanation she found herself unable to speak and overwhelmed with shame. She knew that he as well as herself had come to that place with the wish and intention of speaking on one especial subject, and yet neither of them dared to allude to it. The occurrence of the previous evening weighed on both their souls.

Then with a heart torn with anguish and with tears in her eyes, she told him of the death of Mme Bijard, who had breathed her last that morning after suffering unheard-of agonies.

"It was caused by a kick of Bijard's," she said in her low, soft voice; "some internal injury. For three days she has suffered frightfully. Why are not such men punished? I suppose, though, if the law undertook to punish all the wretches who kill their wives that it would have too much to do. After all, one kick more or less: what does it matter in the end? And this poor creature, in her desire to save her husband from the scaffold, declared she had fallen over a tub."

Goujet did not speak. He sat pulling up the tufts of grass.

"It is not a fortnight," continued Gervaise, "since she weaned her last baby, and here is that child Lalie left to take care of two mites. She is not eight years old but as quiet and sensible as if she were a grown woman, and her father kicks and strikes her too. Poor little soul! There are some persons in this world who seem born to suffer."

Goujet looked at her and then said suddenly, with trembling lips:

"You made me suffer yesterday."

Gervaise clasped her hands imploringly, and he continued:

"I knew of course how it must end; only you should not have allowed me to think——"

He could not finish. She started up, seeing what his convictions were. She cried out:

"You are wrong! I swear to you that you are wrong! He was going to kiss me, but his lips did not touch me, and it is the very first time that he made the attempt. Believe me, for I swear—on all that I hold most sacred—that I am telling you the truth."

But the blacksmith shook his head. He knew that women did not always tell the truth on such points. Gervaise then became very grave.

"You know me well," she said; "you know that I am no liar. I again repeat that Lantier and I are friends. We shall never be anything more, for if that should ever come to pass I should regard myself as the vilest of the vile and should be unworthy of the friendship of a man like yourself." Her face was so honest, her eyes were so clear and frank, that he could do no less than believe her. Once more he breathed freely. He held her hand for the first time. Both were silent. White clouds sailed slowly above their heads with the majesty of swans. The goat looked at them and bleated piteously, eager to be released, and they stood hand in hand on that bleak slope with tears in their eyes.

"Your mother likes me no longer," said Gervaise in a low voice. "Do not say no; how can it be otherwise? We owe you so much money."

He roughly shook her arm in his eagerness to check the words on her lips; he would not hear her. He tried to speak, but his throat was too dry; he choked a little and then he burst out:

"Listen to me," he cried; "I have long wished to say something to you. You are not happy. My mother says things are all going wrong with you, and"—he hesitated—"we must go away together and at once."

She looked at him, not understanding him but impressed by this abrupt declaration of a love from him, who had never before opened his lips in regard to it.

"What do you mean?" she said.

"I mean," he answered without looking in her face, "that we two can go away and live in Belgium. It is almost the same to me as home, and both of us could get work and live comfortably."

The color came to her face, which she would have hidden on his shoulder to hide her shame and confusion. He was a strange fellow to propose an elopement. It was like a book and like the things she heard of in high society. She had often seen and known of the workmen about her making love to married women, but they did not think of running away with them.

"Ah, Monsieur Goujet!" she murmured, but she could say no more.

"Yes," he said, "we two would live all by ourselves."

But as her self-possession returned she refused with firmness.

"It is impossible," she said, "and it would be very wrong. I am married and I have children. I know that you are fond of me, and I love you too much to allow you to commit any such folly as you are talking of, and this would be an enormous folly. No; we must live on as we are. We respect each other now. Let us continue to do so. That is a great deal and will help us over many a roughness in our paths. And when we try to do right we are sure of a reward."

He shook his head as he listened to her, but he felt she was right. Suddenly he snatched her in his arms and kissed her furiously once and then dropped her and turned abruptly away. She was not angry, but the locksmith trembled from head to foot. He began to gather some of the wild daisies, not knowing what to do with his hands, and tossed them into her empty basket. This occupation amused him and tranquillized him. He broke off the head of the flowers

and, when he missed his mark and they fell short of the basket, laughed aloud.

Gervaise sat with her back against the tree, happy and calm. And when she set forth on her walk home her basket was full of daisies, and she was talking of Etienne.

In reality Gervaise was more afraid of Lantier than she was willing to admit even to herself. She was fully determined never to allow the smallest familiarity, but she was afraid that she might yield to his persuasions, for she well knew the weakness and amiability of her nature and how hard it was for her to persist in any opposition to anyone.

Lantier, however, did not put this determination on her part to the test. He was often alone with her now and was always quiet and respectful. Coupeau declared to everyone that Lantier was a true friend. There was no nonsense about him; he could be relied upon always and in all emergencies. And he trusted him thoroughly, he declared. When they went out together—the three—on Sundays he bade his wife and Lantier walk arm in arm, while he mounted guard behind, ready to cuff the ears of anyone who ventured on a disrespectful glance, a sneer or a wink.

He laughed good-naturedly before Lantier's face, told him he put on a great many airs with his coats and his books, but he liked him in spite of them. They understood each other, he said, and a man's liking for another man is more solid and enduring than his love for a woman.

Coupeau and Lantier made the money fly. Lantier was continually borrowing money from Gervaise—ten francs, twenty francs—whenever he knew there was money in the house. It was always because he was in pressing need for some business matter. But still on those same days he took Coupeau off with him and at some distant restaurant ordered and devoured such dishes as they could not obtain at home, and these dishes were washed down by bottle after bottle of wine.

Coupeau would have preferred to get tipsy without the food, but he was impressed by the elegance and experience of his friend, who found on the carte so many extraordinary sauces. He had never seen a man like him, he declared, so dainty and so difficult. He wondered if all southerners were the same as he watched him discussing the dishes with the waiter and sending away a dish that was too salty or had too much pepper.

Neither could he endure a draft: his skin was all blue if a door was left open, and he made no end of a row until it was closed again.

Lantier was not wasteful in certain ways, for he never gave a *garçon* more than two sous after he had served a meal that cost some seven or eight francs.

They never alluded to these dinners the next morning at their simple breakfast with Gervaise. Naturally people cannot frolic and work, too, and since Lantier had become a member of his household Coupeau had never lifted a tool. He knew every drinking shop for miles around and would sit and guzzle deep into the night, not always pleased to find himself deserted by Lantier, who never was known to be overcome by liquor.

About the first of November Coupeau turned over a new leaf; he declared he was going to work the next day, and Lantier thereupon preached a little

sermon, declaring that labor ennobled man, and in the morning arose before it was light to accompany his friend to the shop, as a mark of the respect he felt. But when they reached a wineshop on the corner they entered to take a glass merely to cement good resolutions.

Near the counter they beheld Bibi-la-Grillade smoking his pipe with a sulky air.

"What is the matter, Bibi?" cried Coupeau.

"Nothing," answered his comrade, "except that I got my walking ticket yesterday. Perdition seize all masters!" he added fiercely.

And Bibi accepted a glass of liquor. Lantier defended the masters. They were not so bad after all; then, too, how were the men to get along without them? "To be sure," continued Lantier, "I manage pretty well, for I don't have much to do with them myself!"

"Come, my boy," he added, turning to Coupeau; "we shall be late if we don't look out."

Bibi went out with them. Day was just breaking, gray and cloudy. It had rained the night before and was damp and warm. The street lamps had just been extinguished. There was one continued tramp of men going to their work.

Coupeau, with his bag of tools on his shoulder, shuffled along; his footsteps had long since lost their ring.

"Bibi," he said, "come with me; the master told me to bring a comrade if I pleased."

"It won't be me then," answered Bibi. "I wash my hands of them all. No more masters for me, I tell you! But I dare say Mes-Bottes would be glad of the offer."

And as they reached the Assommoir they saw Mes-Bottes within. Notwithstanding the fact that it was daylight, the gas was blazing in the Assommoir. Lantier remained outside and told Coupeau to make haste, as they had only ten minutes.

"Do you think I will work for your master?" cried Mes-Bottes. "He is the greatest tyrant in the kingdom. No, I should rather suck my thumbs for a year. You won't stay there, old man! No, you won't stay there three days, now I tell you!"

"Are you in earnest?" asked Coupeau uneasily.

"Yes, I am in earnest. You can't speak—you can't move. Your nose is held close to the grindstone all the time. He watches you every moment. If you drink a drop he says you are tipsy and makes no end of a row!"

"Thanks for the warning. I will try this one day, and if the master bothers me I will just tell him what I think of him and turn on my heel and walk out."

Coupeau shook his comrade's hand and turned to depart, much to the disgust of Mes-Bottes, who angrily asked if the master could not wait five minutes. He could not go until he had taken a drink. Lantier entered to join in, and Mes-Bottes stood there with his hat on the back of his head, shabby, dirty and staggering, ordering Father Colombe to pour out the glasses and not to cheat.

At that moment Goujet and Lorilleux were seen going by. Mes-Bottes shouted to them to come in, but they both refused—Goujet saying he wanted nothing,

and the other, as he hugged a little box of gold chains close to his heart, that he was in a hurry.

"Milkshops!" muttered Mes-Bottes. "They had best pass their lives in the corner by the fire!"

Returning to the counter, he renewed his attack on Father Colombe, whom he accused of adulterating his liquors.

It was now bright daylight, and the proprietor of the Assommoir began to extinguish the lights. Coupeau made excuses for his brother-in-law, who, he said, could never drink; it was not his fault, poor fellow! He approved, too, of Goujet, declaring that it was a good thing never to be thirsty. Again he made a move to depart and go to his work when Lantier, with his dictatorial air, reminded him that he had not paid his score and that he could not go off in that way, even if it were to his duty.

"I am sick of the words 'work' and 'duty,'" muttered Mes-Bottes.

They all paid for their drinks with the exception of Bibi-la-Grillade, who stooped toward the ear of Father Colombe and whispered a few words. The latter shook his head, whereupon Mes-Bottes burst into a torrent of invectives, but Colombe stood in impassive silence, and when there was a lull in the storm he said:

"Let your friends pay for you then—that is a very simple thing to do."

By this time Mes-Bottes was what is properly called howling drunk, and as he staggered away from the counter he struck the bag of tools which Coupeau had over his shoulder.

"You look like a peddler with his pack or a humpback. Put it down!"

Coupeau hesitated a moment, and then slowly and deliberately, as if he had arrived at a decision after mature deliberation, he laid his bag on the ground.

"It is too late to go this morning. I will wait until after breakfast now. I will tell him my wife was sick. Listen, Father Colombe, I will leave my bag of tools under this bench and come for them this afternoon."

Lantier assented to this arrangement. Of course work was a good thing, but friends and good company were better; and the four men stood, first on one foot and then on the other, for more than an hour, and then they had another drink all round. After that a game of billiards was proposed, and they went noisily down the street to the nearest billiard room, which did not happen to please the fastidious Lantier, who, however, soon recovered his good humor under the effect of the admiration excited in the minds of his friends by his play, which was really very extraordinary.

When the hour arrived for breakfast Coupeau had an idea.

"Let us go and find Bec Sali. I know where he works. We will make him breakfast with us."

The idea was received with applause. The party started forth. A fine drizzling rain was now falling, but they were too warm within to mind this light sprinkling on their shoulders.

Coupeau took them to a factory where his friend worked and at the door gave two sous to a small boy to go up and find Bec Sali and to tell him that his wife was very sick and had sent for him.

Bec Salı quickly appeared, not in the least disturbed, as he suspected a joke. "Aha!" he said as he saw his friend. "I knew it!" They went to a restaurant and ordered a famous repast of pigs' feet, and they sat and sucked the bones and talked about their various employers.

"Will you believe," said Bec Salı, "that mine has had the brass to hang up a bell? Does he think we are slaves to run when he rings it? Never was he so mistaken—"

"I am obliged to leave you!" said Coupeau, rising at last with an important air. "I promised my wife to go to work today, and I leave you with the greatest reluctance."

The others protested and entreated, but he seemed so decided that they all accompanied him to the Assommoir to get his tools. He pulled out the bag from under the bench and laid it at his feet while they all took another drink. The clock struck one, and Coupeau kicked his bag under the bench again. He would go tomorrow to the factory; one day really did not make much difference.

The rain had ceased, and one of the men proposed a little walk on the boulevards to stretch their legs. The air seemed to stupefy them, and they loitered along with their arms swinging at their sides, without exchanging a word. When they reached the wineshop on the corner of La Rue des Poissonniers they turned in mechanically. Lantier led the way into a small room divided from the public one by windows only. This room was much affected by Lantier, who thought it more stylish by far than the public one. He called for a newspaper, spread it out and examined it with a heavy frown. Coupeau and Mes-Bottes played a game of cards, while wine and glasses occupied the center of the table.

"What is the news?" asked Bibi.

Lantier did not reply instantly, but presently, as the others emptied their glasses, he began to read aloud an account of a frightful murder, to which they listened with eager interest. Then ensued a hot discussion and argument as to the probable motives for the murder.

By this time the wine was exhausted, and they called for more. About five all except Lantier were in a state of beastly intoxication, and he found them so disgusting that, as usual, he made his escape without his comrades noticing his defection.

Lantier walked about a little and then, when he felt all right, went home and told Gervaise that her husband was with his friends. Coupeau did not make his appearance for two days. Rumors were brought in that he had been seen in one place and then in another, and always alone. His comrades had apparently deserted him. Gervaise shrugged her shoulders with a resigned air.

"Good heavens!" she said. "What a way to live!" She never thought of hunting him up. Indeed, on the afternoon of the third day, when she saw him through the window of a wineshop, she turned back and would not pass the door. She sat up for him, however, and listened for his step or the sound of his hand fumbling at the lock.

The next morning he came in, only to begin the same thing at night again.

This went on for a week, and at last Gervaise went to the Assommoir to make inquiries. Yes, he had been there a number of times, but no one knew where he was just then. Gervaise picked up the bag of tools and carried them home.

Lantier, seeing that Gervaise was out of spirits, proposed that she should go with him to a café concert. She refused at first, being in no mood for laughing; otherwise she would have consented, for Lantier's proposal seemed to be prompted by the purest friendliness. He seemed really sorry for her trouble and, indeed, assumed an absolutely paternal air.

Coupeau had never stayed away like this before, and she continually found herself going to the door and looking up and down the street. She could not keep to her work but wandered restlessly from place to place. Had Coupeau broken a limb? Had he fallen into the water? She did not think she could care so very much if he were killed, if this uncertainty were over, if she only knew what she had to expect. But it was very trying to live in this suspense.

Finally when the gas was lit and Lantier renewed his proposition of the café she consented. After all, why should she not go? Why should she refuse all pleasures because her husband chose to behave in this disgraceful way? If he would not come in she would go out.

They hurried through their dinner, and as she went out with Lantier at eight o'clock Gervaise begged Nana and Manma Coupeau to go to bed early. The shop was closed, and she gave the key to Mme Boche, telling her that if Coupeau came in it would be as well to look out for the lights.

Lantier stood whistling while she gave these directions. Gervaise wore her silk dress, and she smiled as they walked down the street in alternate shadow and light from the shopwindows.

The café concert was on the Boulevard de Rochechoumart. It had once been a café and had had a concert room built on of rough planks.

Over the door was a row of glass globes brilliantly illuminated. Long placards, nailed on wood, were standing quite out in the street by the side of the gutter.

"Here we are!" said Lantier. "Mademoiselle Amanda makes her debut to-night."

Bibi-la-Grillade was reading the placard. Bibi had a black eye, as if he had been fighting.

"Hallo!" cried Lantier. "How are you? Where is Coupeau? Have you lost him?"

"Yes, since yesterday. We had a little fight with a waiter at Baquets. He wanted us to pay twice for what we had, and somehow Coupeau and I got separated, and I have not seen him since."

And Bibi gave a great yawn. He was in a disgraceful state of intoxication. He looked as if he had been rolling in the gutter.

"And you know nothing of my husband?" asked Gervaise.

"No, nothing. I think, though, he went off with a coachman."

Lantier and Gervaise passed a very agreeable evening at the café concert, and when the doors were closed at eleven they went home in a sauntering sort of fashion. They were in no hurry, and the night was fair, though a little cool.

Lantier hummed the air which Amanda had sung, and Gervaise added the chorus. The room had been excessively warm, and she had drunk several glasses of wine.

She expressed a great deal of indignation at Mlle Amanda's costume. How did she dare face all those men, dressed like that? But her skin was beautiful, certainly, and she listened with considerable curiosity to all that Lantier could tell her about the woman.

"Everybody is asleep," said Gervaise after she had rung the bell three times.

The door was finally opened, but there was no light. She knocked at the door of the Boche quarters and asked for her key.

The sleepy concierge muttered some unintelligible words, from which Gervaise finally gathered that Coupeau had been brought in by Poisson and that the key was in the door.

Gervaise stood aghast at the disgusting sight that met her eyes as she entered the room where Coupeau lay wallowing on the floor.

She shuddered and turned away. This sight annihilated every ray of sentiment remaining in her heart.

"What am I to do?" she said piteously. "I can't stay here!"

Lantier snatched her hand.

"Gervaise," he said, "listen to me."

But she understood him and drew hastily back.

"No, no! Leave me, Auguste. I can manage."

But Lantier would not obey her. He put his arm around her waist and pointed to her husband as he lay snoring, with his mouth wide open.

"Leave me!" said Gervaise, imploringly, and she pointed to the room where her mother-in-law and Nana slept.

"You will wake them!" she said. "You would not shame me before my child? Pray go!"

He said no more but slowly and softly kissed her on her ear, as he had so often teased her by doing in those old days. Gervaise shivered, and her blood was stirred to madness in her veins.

"What does that beast care?" she thought. "It is his fault," she murmured; "all his fault. He sends me from his room!"

And as Lantier drew her toward his door Nana's face appeared for a moment at the window which lit her little cabinet.

The mother did not see the child, who stood in her nightdress, pale with sleep. She looked at her father as he lay and then watched her mother disappear in Lantier's room. She was perfectly grave, but in her eyes burned the sensual curiosity of premature vice.

CHAPTER IX

CLOUDS IN THE HORIZON

THAT WINTER Mamma Coupeau was very ill with an asthmatic attack, which she always expected in the month of December.

The poor woman suffered much, and the depression of her spirits was naturally very great. It must be confessed that there was nothing very gay in the aspect of the room where she slept. Between her bed and that of the little girl there was just room for a chair. The paper hung in strips from the wall. Through a round window near the ceiling came a dreary gray light. There was little ventilation in the room, which made it especially unfit for the old woman, who at night, when Nana was there and she could hear her breathe, did not complain, but when left alone during the day, moaned incessantly, rolling her head about on her pillow.

"Ah," she said, "how unhappy I am! It is the same as a prison. I wish I were dead!"

And as soon as a visitor came in—Virginie or Mme Boche—she poured out her grievances. "I should not suffer so much among strangers. I should like sometimes a cup of tisane, but I can't get it; and Nana—that child whom I have raised from the cradle—disappears in the morning and never shows her face until night, when she sleeps right through and never once asks me how I am or if she can do anything for me. It will soon be over, and I really believe this clearstarcher would smother me herself—if she were not afraid of the law!"

Gervaise, it is true, was not as gentle and sweet as she had been. Everything seemed to be going wrong with her, and she had lost heart and patience together. Mamma Coupeau had overheard her saying that she was really a great burden. This naturally cut her to the heart, and when she saw her eldest daughter, Mme Lerat, she wept piteously and declared that she was being starved to death, and when these complaints drew from her daughter's pocket a little silver, she expended it in dainties.

She told the most preposterous tales to Mme Lerat about Gervaise—of her new finery and of cakes and delicacies eaten in the corner and many other things of infinitely more consequence. Then in a little while she turned against the Lorilleuxs and talked of them in the most bitter manner. At the height of her illness it so happened that her two daughters met one afternoon at her bedside. Their mother made a motion to them to come closer. Then she went on to tell them, between paroxysms of coughing, that her son came home dead drunk the night before and that she was absolutely certain that Gervaise spent the night in Lantier's room. "It is all the more disgusting," she added, "because I am certain that Nana heard what was going on quite as well as I did."

The two women did not appear either shocked or surprised.

"It is none of our business," said Mme Lorilleux. "If Coupeau does not choose to take any notice of her conduct it is not for us to do so."

All the neighborhood were soon informed of the condition of things by her two sisters-in-law, who declared they entered her doors only on their mother's account, who, poor thing, was compelled to live amid these abominations.

Everyone accused Gervaise now of having perverted poor Lantier. "Men will be men," they said; "surely you can't expect them to turn a cold shoulder to women who throw themselves at their heads. She has no possible excuse; she is a disgrace to the whole street!"

The Lorilleuxs invited Nana to dinner that they might question her, but as

soon as they began the child looked absolutely stupid, and they could extort nothing from her.

Amid this sudden and fierce indignation Gervaise lived—indifferent, dull and stupid. At first she loathed herself, and if Coupeau laid his hand on her she shivered and ran away from him. But by degrees she became accustomed to it. Her indolence had become excessive, and she only wished to be quiet and comfortable.

After all, she asked herself, why should she care? If her lover and her husband were satisfied, why should she not be too? So the household went on much as usual to all appearance. In reality, whenever Coupeau came in tipsy, she left and went to Lantier's room to sleep. She was not led there by passion or affection; it was simply that it was more comfortable. She was very like a cat in her choice of soft, clean places.

Mamma Coupeau never dared to speak out openly to the clearstarcher, but after a dispute she was unsparing in her hints and allusions. The first time Gervaise fixed her eyes on her and heard all she had to say in profound silence. Then without seeming to speak of herself, she took occasion to say not long afterward that when a woman was married to a man who was drinking himself to death a woman was very much to be pitied and by no means to blame if she looked for consolation elsewhere.

Another time, when taunted by the old woman, she went still further and declared that Lantier was as much her husband as was Coupeau—that he was the father of two of her children. She talked a little twaddle about the laws of nature, and a shrewd observer would have seen that she—parrotlike—was repeating the words that some other person had put into her mouth. Besides, what were her neighbors doing all about her? They were not so extremely respectable that they had the right to attack her. And then she took house after house and showed her mother-in-law that while apparently so deaf to gossip she yet knew all that was going on about her. Yes, she knew—and now seemed to gloat over that which once had shocked and revolted her.

"It is none of my business, I admit," she cried; "let each person live as he pleases, according to his own light, and let everybody else alone."

One day when Mamma Coupeau spoke out more clearly she said with compressed lips:

"Now look here, you are flat on your back and you take advantage of that fact. I have never said a word to you about your own life, but I know it all the same—and it was atrocious! That is all! I am not going into particulars, but remember, you had best not sit in judgment on me!"

The old woman was nearly suffocated with rage and her cough.

The next day Goujet came for his mother's wash while Gervaise was out. Mamma Coupeau called him into her room and kept him for an hour. She read the young man's heart; she knew that his suspicions made him miserable. And in revenge for something that had displeased her she told him the truth with many sighs and tears, as if her daughter-in-law's infamous conduct was a bitter blow to her.

When Goujet left her room he was deadly pale and looked ten years older

than when he went in. The old woman had, too, the additional pleasure of telling Gervaise on her return that Mme Goujet had sent word that her linen must be returned to her at once, ironed or unironed. And she was so animated and comparatively amiable that Gervaise scented the truth and knew instinctively what she had done and what she was to expect with Goujet. Pale and trembling, she piled the linen neatly in a basket and set forth to see Mme Goujet. Years had passed since she had paid her friends one penny. The debt still stood at four hundred and twenty-five francs. Each time she took the money for her washing she spoke of being pressed just at that time. It was a great mortification for her.

Coupeau was, however, less scrupulous and said with a laugh that if she kissed her friend occasionally in the corner it would keep things straight and pay him well. Then Gervaise, with eyes blazing with indignation, would ask if he really meant that. Had he fallen so low? Nor should he speak of Goujet in that way in her presence.

Every time she took home the linen of these former friends she ascended the stairs with a sick heart.

"Ah, it is you, is it?" said Mme Goujet coldly as she opened the door.

Gervaise entered with some hesitation; she did not dare attempt to excuse herself. She was no longer punctual to the hour or the day—everything about her was becoming perfectly disorderly.

"For one whole week," resumed the lace mender, "you have kept me waiting. You have told me falsehood after falsehood. You have sent your apprentice to tell me that there was an accident—something had been spilled on the shirts, they would come the next day, and so on. I have been unnecessarily annoyed and worried, besides losing much time. There is no sense in it! Now what have you brought home? Are the shirts here which you have had for a month and the skirt which was missing last week?"

"Yes," said Gervaise, almost inaudibly; "yes, the skirt is here. Look at it!"

But Mme Goujet cried out in indignation.

That skirt did not belong to her, and she would not have it. This was the crowning touch, if her things were to be changed in this way. She did not like other people's things.

"And the shirts? Where are they? Lost, I suppose. Very well, settle it as you please, but these shirts I must have tomorrow morning!"

There was a long silence. Gervaise was much disturbed by seeing that the door of Goujet's room was wide open. He was there, she was sure, and listening to all these reproaches which she knew to be deserved and to which she could not reply. She was very quiet and submissive and laid the linen on the bed as quickly as possible.

Mme Goujet began to examine the pieces.

"Well! Well!" she said. "No one can praise your washing nowadays. There is not a piece here that is not dirtied by the iron. Look at this shirt: it is scorched, and the buttons are fairly torn off by the root. Everything comes back—that comes at all, I should say—with the buttons off. Look at that sack: the dirt is all in it. No, no, I can't pay for such washing as this!"

She stopped talking while she counted the pieces. Then she exclaimed:

"Two pairs of stockings, six towels and one napkin are missing from this week. You are laughing at me, it seems. Now, just understand, I tell you to bring back all you have, ironed or not ironed. If in an hour your woman is not here with the rest I have done with you, Madame Coupeau!"

At this moment Goujet coughed. Gervaise started. How could she bear being treated in this way before him? And she stood confused and silent, waiting for the soiled clothes.

Mme Goujet had taken her place and her work by the window.

"And the linen?" said Gervaise timidly.

"Many thanks," said the old woman. "There is nothing this week."

Gervaise turned pale; it was clear that Mme Goujet meant to take away her custom from her. She sank into a chair. She made no attempt at excuses; she only asked a question.

"Is Monsieur Goujet ill?"

"He is not well; at least he has just come in and is lying down to rest a little."

Mme Goujet spoke very slowly, almost solemnly, her pale face encircled by her white cap, and wearing, as usual, her plain black dress.

And she explained that they were obliged to economize very closely. In future she herself would do their washing. Of course Gervaise must know that this would not be necessary had she and her husband paid their debt to her son. But of course they would submit; they would never think of going to law about it. While she spoke of the debt her needle moved rapidly to and fro in the delicate meshes of her work.

"But," continued Mme Goujet, "if you were to deny yourself a little and be careful and prudent, you could soon discharge your debt to us; you live too well; you spend too freely. Were you to give us only ten francs each month—"

She was interrupted by her son, who called impatiently, "Mother! Come here, will you?"

When she returned she changed the conversation. Her son had undoubtedly begged her to say no more about this money to Gervaise. In spite of her evident determination to avoid this subject, she returned to it again in about ten minutes. She knew from the beginning just what would happen. She had said so at the time, and all had turned out precisely as she had prophesied. The tinworker had drunk up the shop and had left his wife to bear the load by herself. If her son had taken her advice he would never have lent the money. His marriage had fallen through, and he had lost his spirits. She grew very angry as she spoke and finally accused Gervaise openly of having, with her husband, deliberately conspired to cheat her simplehearted son.

"Many women," she exclaimed, "played the parts of hypocrites and prudes for years and were found out at the last!"

"Mother! Mother!" called Goujet peremptorily.

She rose and when she returned said:

"Go in; he wants to see you."

Gervaise obeyed, leaving the door open behind her. She found the room

sweet and fresh looking, like that of a young girl, with its simple pictures and white curtains.

Goujet, crushed by what he had heard from Mamma Coupeau, lay at full length on the bed with pale face and haggard eyes.

"Listen!" he said. "You must not mind my mother's words; she does not understand. You do not owe me anything."

He staggered to his feet and stood leaning against the bed and looking at her.

"Are you ill?" she said nervously.

"No, not ill," he answered, "but sick at heart. Sick when I remember what you said and see the truth. Leave me. I cannot bear to look at you."

And he waved her away, not angrily, but with great decision. She went out without a word, for she had nothing to say. In the next room she took up her basket and stood still a moment; Mme Goujet did not look up, but she said:

"Remember, I want my linen at once, and when that is all sent back to me we will settle the account."

"Yes," answered Gervaise. And she closed the door, leaving behind her all that sweet odor and cleanliness on which she had once placed so high a value. She returned to the shop with her head bowed down and looking neither to the right nor the left.

Mother Coupeau was sitting by the fire, having left her bed for the first time. Gervaise said nothing to her—not a word of reproach or congratulation. She felt deadly tired; all her bones ached, as if she had been beaten. She thought life very hard and wished that it were over for her.

Gervaise soon grew to care for nothing but her three meals per day. The shop ran itself; one by one her customers left her. Gervaise shrugged her shoulders half indifferently, half insolently; everybody could leave her, she said: she could always get work. But she was mistaken, and soon it became necessary for her to dismiss Mme Putois, keeping no assistant except Augustine, who seemed to grow more and more stupid as time went on. Ruin was fast approaching. Naturally, as indolence and poverty increased, so did lack of cleanliness. No one would ever have known that pretty blue shop in which Gervaise had formerly taken such pride. The windows were unwashed and covered with the mud scattered by the passing carriages. Within it was still more forlorn: the dampness of the steaming linen had ruined the paper; everything was covered with dust; the stove, which once had been kept so bright, was broken and battered. The long ironing table was covered with wine stains and grease, looking as if it had served a whole garrison. The atmosphere was loaded with a smell of cooking and of sour starch. But Gervaise was unconscious of it. She did not notice the torn and untidy paper and, having ceased to pay any attention to personal cleanliness, was hardly likely to spend her time in scrubbing the greasy floors. She allowed the dust to accumulate over everything and never lifted a finger to remove it. Her own comfort and tranquillity were now her first considerations.

Her debts were increasing, but they had ceased to give her any uneasiness. She was no longer honest or straightforward. She did not care whether she ever paid or not, so long as she got what she wanted. When one shop refused

her more credit she opened an account next door. She owed something in every shop in the whole *Quartier*. She dared not pass the grocer or the baker in her own street and was compelled to make a lengthy circuit each time she went out. The tradespeople muttered and grumbled, and some went so far as to call her a thief and a swindler.

One evening the man who had sold her the furniture for Lantier's room came in with ugly threats.

Such scenes were unquestionably disagreeable. She trembled for an hour after them, but they never took away her appetite.

It was very stupid of these people, after all, she said to Lantier. How could she pay them if she had no money? And where could she get money? She closed her eyes to the inevitable and would not think of the future. Mamma Coupeau was well again, but the household had been disorganized for more than a year. In summer there was more work brought to the shop—white skirts and cambric dresses. There were ups and downs, therefore: days when there was nothing in the house for supper and others when the table was loaded.

Mamma Coupeau was seen almost daily, going out with a bundle under her apron and returning without it and with a radiant face, for the old woman liked the excitement of going to the Mont-de-Piété.

Gervaise was gradually emptying the house—linen and clothes, tools and furniture. In the beginning she took advantage of a good week to take out what she had pawned the week before, but after a while she ceased to do that and sold her tickets. There was only one thing which cost her a pang, and that was selling her clock. She had sworn she would not touch it, not unless she was dying of hunger, and when at last she saw her mother-in-law carry it away she dropped into a chair and wept like a baby. But when the old woman came back with twenty-five francs and she found she had five francs more than was demanded by the pressing debt which had caused her to make the sacrifice, she was consoled and sent out at once for four sous' worth of brandy. When these two women were on good terms they often drank a glass together, sitting at the corner of the ironing table.

Mamma Coupeau had a wonderful talent for bringing a glass in the pocket of her apron without spilling a drop. She did not care to have the neighbors know, but, in good truth, the neighbors knew very well and laughed and sneered as the old woman went in and out.

This, as was natural and right, increased the prejudice against Gervaise. Everyone said that things could not go on much longer; the end was near.

Amid all this ruin Coupeau thrived surprisingly. Bad liquor seemed to affect him agreeably. His appetite was good in spite of the amount he drank, and he was growing stout. Lantier, however, shook his head, declaring that it was not honest flesh and that he was bloated. But Coupeau drank all the more after this statement and was rarely or ever sober. There began to be a strange bluish tone in his complexion. His spirits never flagged. He laughed at his wife when she told him of her embarrassments. What did he care, so long as she provided him with food to eat? And the longer he was idle, the more exacting he became in regard to this food.

He was ignorant of his wife's infidelity, at least, so all his friends declared. They believed, moreover, that were he to discover it there would be great trouble. But Mme Lerat, his own sister, shook her head doubtfully, averring that she was not so sure of his ignorance.

Lantier was also in good health and spirits, neither too stout nor too thin. He wished to remain just where he was, for he was thoroughly well satisfied with himself, and this made him critical in regard to his food, as he had made a study of the things he should eat and those he should avoid for the preservation of his figure. Even when there was not a cent he asked for eggs and cutlets: nourishing and light things were what he required, he said. He ruled Gervaise with a rod of iron, grumbled and found fault far more than Coupeau ever did. It was a house with two masters, one of whom, cleverer by far than the other, took the best of everything. He skimmed the Coupeaus, as it were, and kept all the cream for himself. He was fond of Nana because he liked girls better than boys. He troubled himself little about Etienne.

When people came and asked for Coupeau it was Lantier who appeared in his shirt sleeves with the air of the man of the house who is needlessly disturbed. He answered for Coupeau, said it was one and the same thing.

Gervaise did not find this life always smooth and agreeable. She had no reason to complain of her health. She had become very stout. But it was hard work to provide for and please these two men. When they came in, furious and out of temper, it was on her that they wreaked their rage. Coupeau abused her frightfully and called her by the coarsest epithets. Lantier, on the contrary, was more select in his phraseology, but his words cut her quite as deeply. Fortunately people become accustomed to almost everything in this world, and Gervaise soon ceased to care for the reproaches and injustice of these two men. She even preferred to have them out of temper with her, for then they let her alone in some degree; but when they were in a good humor they were all the time at her heels, and she could not find a leisure moment even to iron a cap, so constant were the demands they made upon her. They wanted her to do this and do that, to cook little dishes for them and wait upon them by inches.

One night she dreamed she was at the bottom of a well. Coupeau was pushing her down with his fists, and Lantier was tickling her to make her jump out quicker. And this, she thought, was a very fair picture of her life! She said that the people of the *Quartier* were very unjust, after all, when they reproached her for the way of life into which she had fallen. It was not her fault. It was not she who had done it, and a little shiver ran over her as she reflected that perhaps the worst was not yet.

The utter deterioration of her nature was shown by the fact that she detested neither her husband nor Lantier. In a play at the *Gaité* she had seen a woman hate her husband and poison him for the sake of her lover. This she thought very strange and unnatural. Why could the three not have lived together peaceably? It would have been much more reasonable!

In spite of her debts, in spite of the shifts to which her increasing poverty

condemned her, Gervaise would have considered herself quite well off, but for the exacting selfishness of Lantier and Coupeau.

Toward autumn Lantier became more and more disgusted, declared he had nothing to live on but potato parings and that his health was suffering. He was enraged at seeing the house so thoroughly cleared out, and he felt that the day was not far off when he must take his hat and depart. He had become accustomed to his den, and he hated to leave it. He was thoroughly provoked that the extravagant habits of Gervaise necessitated this sacrifice on his part. Why could she not have shown more sense? He was sure he didn't know what would become of them. Could they have struggled on six months longer, he could have concluded an affair which would have enabled him to support the whole family in comfort.

One day it came to pass that there was not a mouthful in the house, not even a radish. Lantier sat by the stove in somber discontent. Finally he started up and went to call on the Poissons, to whom he suddenly became friendly to a degree. He no longer taunted the police officer but condescended to admit that the emperor was a good fellow after all. He showed himself especially civil to Virginie, whom he considered a clever woman and well able to steer her bark through stormy seas.

Virginie one day happened to say in his presence that she should like to establish herself in some business. He approved the plan and paid her a succession of adroit compliments on her capabilities and cited the example of several women he knew who had made or were making their fortunes in this way.

Virginie had the money, an inheritance from an aunt, but she hesitated, for she did not wish to leave the *Quartier* and she did not know of any shop she could have. Then Lantier led her into a corner and whispered to her for ten minutes; he seemed to be persuading her to something. They continued to talk together in this way at intervals for several days, seeming to have some secret understanding.

Lantier all this time was fretting and scolding at the Coupeaus, asking Gervaise what on earth she intended to do, begging her to look things fairly in the face. She owed five or six hundred francs to the tradespeople about her. She was behindhand with her rent, and Marescot, the landlord, threatened to turn her out if they did not pay before the first of January.

The Mont-de-Piété had taken everything; there was literally nothing but the nails in the walls left. What did she mean to do?

Gervaise listened to all this at first listlessly, but she grew angry at last and cried out:

"Look here! I will go away tomorrow and leave the key in the door. I had rather sleep in the gutter than live in this way!"

"And I can't say that it would not be a wise thing for you to do!" answered Lantier insidiously. "I might possibly assist you to find someone to take the lease off your hands whenever you really conclude to leave the shop."

"I am ready to leave it at once!" cried Gervaise violently. "I am sick and tired of it."

Then Lantier became serious and businesslike. He spoke openly of Virginie, who, he said, was looking for a shop; in fact, he now remembered having heard her say that she would like just such a one as this.

But Gervaise shrank back and grew strangely calm at this name of Virginie.

She would see, she said; on the whole, she must have time to think. People said a great many things when they were angry, which on reflection were found not to be advisable.

Lantier rang the changes on this subject for a week, but Gervaise said she had decided to employ some woman and go to work again, and if she were not able to get back her old customers she could try for new ones. She said this merely to show Lantier that she was not so utterly downcast and crushed as he had seemed to take for granted was the case.

He was reckless enough to drop the name of Virginie once more, and she turned upon him in a rage.

"No, no, never!" She had always distrusted Virginie, and if she wanted the shop it was only to humiliate her. Any other woman might have it, but not this hypocrite, who had been waiting for years to gloat over her downfall. No, she understood now only too well the meaning of the yellow sparks in her cat's eyes. It was clear to her that Virginie had never forgotten the scene in the lavatory, and if she did not look out there would be a repetition of it.

Lantier stood aghast at this anger and this torrent of words, but presently he plucked up courage and bade her hold her tongue and told her she should not talk of his friends in that way. As for himself, he was sick and tired of other people's affairs; in future he would let them all take care of themselves, without a word of counsel from him.

January arrived, cold and damp. Mamma Coupeau took to her bed with a violent cold which she expected each year at this time. But those about her said she would never leave the house again, except feet first.

Her children had learned to look forward to her death as a happy deliverance for all. The physician who came once was not sent for again. A little tisane was given her from time to time that she might not feel herself utterly neglected. She was just alive; that was all. It now became a mere question of time with her, but her brain was clear still, and in the expression of her eyes there were many things to be read—sorrow at seeing no sorrow in those she left behind her and anger against Nana, who was utterly indifferent to her.

One Monday evening Coupeau came in as tipsy as usual and threw himself on the bed, all dressed. Gervaise intended to remain with her mother-in-law part of the night, but Nana was very brave and said she would hear if her grandmother moved and wanted anything.

About half-past three Gervaise woke with a start; it seemed to her that a cold blast had swept through the room. Her candle had burned down, and she hastily wrapped a shawl around her with trembling hands and hurried into the next room. Nana was sleeping quietly, and her grandmother was dead in the bed at her side.

Gervaise went to Lantier and waked him.

"She is dead," she said.

"Well, what of it?" he muttered, half asleep. "Why don't you go to sleep?"

She turned away in silence while he grumbled at her coming to disturb him by the intelligence of a death in the house.

Gervaise dressed herself, not without tears, for she really loved the cross old woman whose son lay in the heavy slumbers of intoxication.

When she went back to the room she found Nana sitting up and rubbing her eyes. The child realized what had come to pass and trembled nervously in the face of this death of which she had thought much in the last two days, as of something which was hidden from children.

"Get up!" said her mother in a low voice. "I do not wish you to stay here."

The child slipped from her bed slowly and regretfully, with her eyes fixed on the dead body of her grandmother.

Gervaise did not know what to do with her or where to send her. At this moment Lantier appeared at the door. He had dressed himself, impelled by a little shame at his own conduct.

"Let the child go into my room," he said, "and I will help you."

Nana looked first at her mother and then at Lantier and then trotted with her little bare feet into the next room and slipped into the bed that was still warm.

She lay there wide awake with blazing cheeks and eyes and seemed to be absorbed in thought.

While Lantier and Gervaise were silently occupied with the dead Coupeau lay and snored.

Gervaise hunted in a bureau to find a little crucifix which she had brought from Plassans, when she suddenly remembered that Mamma Coupeau had sold it. They each took a glass of wine and sat by the stove until daybreak.

About seven o'clock Coupeau woke. When he heard what had happened he declared they were jesting. But when he saw the body he fell on his knees and wept like a baby. Gervaise was touched by these tears and found her heart softer toward her husband than it had been for many a long year.

"Courage, old friend!" said Lantier, pouring out a glass of wine as he spoke.

Coupeau took some wine, but he continued to weep, and Lantier went off under pretext of informing the family, but he did not hurry. He walked along slowly, smoking a cigar, and after he had been to Mme Lerat's he stopped in at a *cr  merie* to take a cup of coffee, and there he sat for an hour or more in deep thought.

By nine o'clock the family were assembled in the shop, whose shutters had not been taken down. Lorilleux only remained for a few moments and then went back to his shop. Mme Lorilleux shed a few tears and then sent Nana to buy a pound of candles.

"How like Gervaise!" she murmured. "She can do nothing in a proper way!"

Mme Lerat went about among the neighbors to borrow a crucifix. She brought one so large that when it was laid on the breast of Mamma Coupeau the weight seemed to crush her.

Then someone said something about holy water, so Nana was sent to the

church with a bottle. The room assumed a new aspect. On a small table burned a candle, near it a glass of holy water in which was a branch of box.

"Everything is in order," murmured the sisters; "people can come now as soon as they please."

Lantier made his appearance about eleven. He had been to make inquiries in regard to funeral expenses.

"The coffin," he said, "is twelve francs, and if you want a Mass, ten francs more. A hearse is paid for according to its ornaments."

"You must remember," said Mme Lorilleux with compressed lips, "that Mamma must be buried according to her purse."

"Precisely!" answered Lantier. "I only tell you this as your guide. Decide what you want, and after breakfast I will go and attend to it all."

He spoke in a low voice, oppressed by the presence of the dead. The children were laughing in the courtyard and Nana singing loudly.

Gervaise said gently:

"We are not rich, to be sure, but we wish to do what she would have liked. If Mamma Coupeau has left us nothing it was not her fault and no reason why we should bury her as if she were a dog. No, there must be a Mass and a hearse."

"And who will pay for it?" asked Mme Lorilleux. "We can't, for we lost much money last week, and I am quite sure you would find it hard work!"

Coupeau, when he was consulted, shrugged his shoulders with a gesture of profound indifference. Mme Lerat said she would pay her share.

"There are three of us," said Gervaise after a long calculation; "if we each pay thirty francs we can do it with decency."

But Mme Lorilleux burst out furiously:

"I will never consent to such folly. It is not that I care for the money, but I disapprove of the ostentation. You can do as you please."

"Very well," replied Gervaise, "I will. I have taken care of your mother while she was living; I can bury her now that she is dead."

Then Mme Lorilleux fell to crying, and Lantier had great trouble in preventing her from going away at once, and the quarrel grew so violent that Mme Lerat hastily closed the door of the room where the dead woman lay, as if she feared the noise would waken her. The children's voices rose shrill in the air with Nana's perpetual "Tra-la-la" above all the rest.

"Heavens, how wearisome those children are with their songs," said Lantier. "Tell them to be quiet, and make Nana come in and sit down."

Gervaise obeyed these dictatorial orders while her sisters-in-law went home to breakfast, while the Coupeaus tried to eat, but they were made uncomfortable by the presence of death in their crowded quarters. The details of their daily life were disarranged.

Gervaise went to Goujet and borrowed sixty francs, which, added to thirty from Mme Lerat, would pay the expenses of the funeral. In the afternoon several persons came in and looked at the dead woman, crossing themselves as they did so and shaking holy water over the body with the branch of box.

They then took their seats in the shop and talked of the poor thing and of her many virtues. One said she had talked with her only three days before, and another asked if it were not possible it was a trance.

By evening the Coupeaus felt it was more than they could bear. It was a mistake to keep a body so long. One has, after all, only so many tears to shed, and that done, grief turns to worry. Mamma Coupeau—stiff and cold—was a terrible weight on them all. They gradually lost the sense of oppression, however, and spoke louder.

After a while M. Marescot appeared. He went to the inner room and knelt at the side of the corpse. He was very religious, they saw. He made a sign of the cross in the air and dipped the branch into the holy water and sprinkled the body. M. Marescot, having finished his devotions, passed out into the shop and said to Coupeau:

"I came for the two quarters that are due. Have you got the money for me?"

"No sir, not entirely," said Gervaise, coming forward, excessively annoyed at this scene taking place in the presence of her sisters-in-law. "You see, this trouble came upon us—"

"Undoubtedly," answered her landlord; "but we all of us have our troubles. I cannot wait any longer. I really must have the money. If I am not paid by tomorrow I shall most assuredly take immediate measures to turn you out."

Gervaise clasped her hands imploringly, but he shook his head, saying that discussion was useless; besides, just then it would be a disrespect to the dead.

"A thousand pardons!" he said as he went out. "But remember that I must have the money tomorrow."

And as he passed the open door of the lighted room he saluted the corpse with another genuflection.

After he had gone the ladies gathered around the stove, where a great pot of coffee stood, enough to keep them all awake for the whole night. The Poissons arrived about eight o'clock; then Lantier, carefully watching Gervaise, began to speak of the disgraceful act committed by the landlord in coming to a house to collect money at such a time.

"He is a thorough hypocrite," continued Lantier, "and were I in Madame Coupeau's place, I would walk off and leave his house on his hands."

Gervaise heard but did not seem to heed.

The Lorilleuxs, delighted at the idea that she would lose her shop, declared that Lantier's idea was an excellent one. They gave Coupeau a push and repeated it to him.

Gervaise seemed to be disposed to yield, and then Virginie spoke in the blandest of tones.

"I will take the lease off your hands," she said, "and will arrange the back rent with your landlord."

"No, no! Thank you," cried Gervaise, shaking off the lethargy in which she had been wrapped. "I can manage this matter and I can work. No, no, I say."

Lantier interposed and said soothingly:

"Never mind! We will talk of it another time—tomorrow, possibly."

The family were to sit up all night. Nana cried vociferously when she was

sent into the Boche quarters to sleep; the Poissons remained until midnight. Virginie began to talk of the country: she would like to be buried under a tree with flowers and grass on her grave. Mme Lerat said that in her wardrobe—folded up in lavender—was the linen sheet in which her body was to be wrapped.

When the Poissons went away Lantier accompanied them in order, he said, to leave his bed for the ladies, who could take turns in sleeping there. But the ladies preferred to remain together about the stove.

Mme Lorilleux said she had no black dress, and it was too bad that she must buy one, for they were sadly pinched just at this time. And she asked Gervaise if she was sure that her mother had not a black skirt which would do, one that had been given her on her birthday. Gervaise went for the skirt. Yes, it would do if it were taken in at the waist.

Then Mme Lorilleux looked at the bed and the wardrobe and asked if there was nothing else belonging to her mother.

Here Mme Lerat interfered. The Coupeaus, she said, had taken care of her mother, and they were entitled to all the trifles she had left. The night seemed endless. They drank coffee and went by turns to look at the body, lying silent and calm under the flickering light of the candle.

The interment was to take place at half-past ten, but Gervaise would gladly have given a hundred francs, if she had had them, to anyone who would have taken Mamma Coupeau away three hours before the time fixed.

"Ah," she said to herself, "it is no use to disguise the fact: people are very much in the way after they are dead, no matter how much you have loved them!"

Father Bazonge, who was never known to be sober, appeared with the coffin and the pall. When he saw Gervaise he stood with his eyes starting from his head.

"I beg you pardon," he said, "but I thought it was for you," and he was turning to go away.

"Leave the coffin!" cried Gervaise, growing very pale. Bazonge began to apologize:

"I heard them talking yesterday, but I did not pay much attention. I congratulate you that you are still alive. Though why I do, I do not know, for life is not such a very agreeable thing."

Gervaise listened with a shiver of horror and a morbid dread that he would take her away and shut her up in his box and bury her. She had once heard him say that he knew a woman who would be only too thankful if he would do exactly that.

"He is horribly drunk," she murmured in a tone of mingled disgust and terror.

"It will come for you another time," he said with a laugh; "you have only to make me a little sign. I am a great consolation to women sometimes, and you need not sneer at poor Father Bazonge, for he has held many a fine lady in his arms, and they made no complaint when he laid them down to sleep in the shade of the evergreens."

"Do hold your tongue," said Lorilleux; "this is no time for such talk. Be off with you!"

The clock struck ten. The friends and neighbors had assembled in the shop while the family were in the back room, nervous and feverish with suspense.

Four men appeared—the undertaker, Bazonge and his three assistants placed the body in the coffin. Bazonge held the screws in his mouth and waited for the family to take their last farewell.

Then Coupeau, his two sisters and Gervaise kissed their mother, and their tears fell fast on her cold face. The lid was put on and fastened down.

The hearse was at the door to the great edification of the tradespeople of the neighborhood, who said under their breath that the Coupeaus had best pay their debts.

"It is shameful," Gervaise was saying at the same moment, speaking of the Lorilleuxs. "These people have not even brought a bouquet of violets for their mother."

It was true they had come empty-handed, while Mme Lerat had brought a wreath of artificial flowers which was laid on the bier.

Coupeau and Lorilleux, with their hats in their hands, walked at the head of the procession of men. After them followed the ladies, headed by Mme Lorilleux in her black skirt, wrenched from the dead, her sister trying to cover a purple dress with a large black shawl.

Gervaise had lingered behind to close the shop and give Nana into the charge of Mme Boche and then ran to overtake the procession, while the little girl stood with the concierge, profoundly interested in seeing her grandmother carried in that beautiful carriage.

Just as Gervaise joined the procession Goujet came up a side street and saluted her with a slight bow and with a faint sweet smile. The tears rushed to her eyes. She did not weep for Mamma Coupeau but rather for herself, but her sisters-in-law looked at her as if she were the greatest hypocrite in the world.

At the church the ceremony was of short duration. The Mass dragged a little because the priest was very old.

The cemetery was not far off, and the cortege soon reached it. A priest came out of a house near by and shivered as he saw his breath rise with each *De Profundis* he uttered.

The coffin was lowered, and as the frozen earth fell upon it more tears were shed, accompanied, however, by sigh of relief.

The procession dispersed outside the gates of the cemetery, and at the very first cabaret Coupeau turned in, leaving Gervaise alone on the sidewalk. She beckoned to Goujet, who was turning the corner.

"I want to speak to you," she said timidly. "I want to tell you how ashamed I am for coming to you again to borrow money, but I was at my wit's end."

"I am always glad to be of use to you," answered the blacksmith. "But pray never allude to the matter before my mother, for I do not wish to trouble her. She and I think differently on many subjects."

She looked at him sadly and earnestly. Through her mind flitted a vague

regret that she had not done as he desired, that she had not gone away with him somewhere. Then a vile temptation assailed her. She trembled.

"You are not angry now?" she said entreatingly.

"No, not angry, but still heartsick. All is over between us now and forever." And he walked off with long strides, leaving Gervaise stunned by his words.

"All is over between us!" she kept saying to herself. "And what more is there for me then in life?"

She sat down in her empty, desolate room and drank a large tumbler of wine. When the others came in she looked up suddenly and said to Virginie gently:

"If you want the shop, take it!"

Virginie and her husband jumped at this and sent for the concierge, who consented to the arrangement on condition that the new tenants would become security for the two quarters then due.

This was agreed upon. The Coupeaus would take a room on the sixth floor near the Lorilleuxs. Lantier said politely that if it would not be disagreeable to the Poissons he should like much to retain his present quarters.

The policeman bowed stiffly but with every intention of being cordial and said he decidedly approved of the idea.

Then Lantier withdrew from the discussion entirely, watching Gervaise and Virginie out of the corners of his eyes.

That evening when Gervaise was alone again she felt utterly exhausted. The place looked twice its usual size. It seemed to her that in leaving Mamma Coupeau in the quiet cemetery she had also left much that was precious to her, a portion of her own life, her pride in her shop, her hopes and her energy. These were not all, either, that she had buried that day. Her heart was as bare and empty as her walls and her home. She was too weary to try and analyze her sensations but moved about as if in a dream.

At ten o'clock, when Nana was undressed, she wept, begging that she might be allowed to sleep in her grandmother's bed. Her mother vaguely wondered that the child was not afraid and allowed her to do as she pleased.

Nana was not timid by nature, and only her curiosity, not her fears, had been excited by the events of the last three days, and she curled herself up with delight in the soft, warm feather bed.

CHAPTER X

DISASTERS AND CHANGES

THE NEW LODGING of the Coupeaus was next that of the Bijards. Almost opposite their door was a closet under the stairs which went up to the roof—a mere hole without light or ventilation, where Father Bru slept.

A chamber and a small room, about as large as one's hand, were all the Coupeaus had now. Nana's little bed stood in the small room, the door of which had to be left open at night, lest the child should stifle.

When it came to the final move Gervaise felt that she could not separate

from the commode which she had spent so much time in polishing when first married and insisted on its going to their new quarters, where it was much in the way and stopped up half the window, and when Gervaise wished to look out into the court she had not room for her elbows.

The first few days she spent in tears. She felt smothered and cramped; after having had so much room to move about in it seemed to her that she was smothering. It was only at the window she could breathe. The courtyard was not a place calculated to inspire cheerful thoughts. Opposite her was the window which years before had elicited her admiration, where every successive summer scarlet beans had grown to a fabulous height on slender strings. Her room was on the shady side, and a pot of mignonette would die in a week on her sill.

No, life had not been what she hoped, and it was all very hard to bear.

Instead of flowers to solace her declining years she would have but thorns. One day as she was looking down into the court she had the strangest feeling imaginable. She seemed to see herself standing just near the loge of the concierge, looking up at the house and examining it for the first time.

This glimpse of the past made her feel faint. It was at least thirteen years since she had first seen this huge building—this world within a world. The court had not changed. The façade was simply more dingy. The same clothes seemed to be hanging at the windows to dry. Below there were the shavings from the cabinetmaker's shop, and the gutter glittered with blue water, as blue and soft in tone as the water she remembered.

But she—alas, how changed was she! She no longer looked up to the sky. She was no longer hopeful, courageous and ambitious. She was living under the very roof in crowded discomfort, where never a ray of sunshine could reach her, and her tears fell fast in utter discouragement.

Nevertheless, when Gervaise became accustomed to her new surroundings she grew more content. The pieces of furniture she had sold to Virginie had facilitated her installation. When the fine weather came Coupeau had an opportunity of going into the country to work. He went and lived three months without drinking—cured for the time being by the fresh, pure air. It does a man sometimes an infinite deal of good to be taken away from all his old haunts and from Parisian streets, which always seem to exhale a smell of brandy and of wine.

He came back as fresh as a rose, and he brought four hundred francs with which he paid the Poissons the amount for which they had become security as well as several other small but pressing debts. Gervaise had now two or three streets open to her again, which for some time she had not dared to enter.

She now went out to iron by the day and had gone back to her old mistress, Mme Fauconnier, who was a kindhearted creature and ready to do anything for anyone who flattered her adroitly.

With diligence and economy Gervaise could have managed to live comfortably and pay all her debts, but this prospect did not charm her particularly. She suffered acutely in seeing the Poissons in her old shop. She was by no means of a jealous or envious disposition, but it was not agreeable to her to hear the

admiration expressed for her successors by her husband's sisters. To hear them one would suppose that never had so beautiful a shop been seen before. They spoke of the filthy condition of the place when Virginie moved in—who had paid, they declared, thirty francs for cleaning it.

Virginie, after some hesitation, had decided on a small stock of groceries—sugar, tea and coffee, also bonbons and chocolate. Lantier had advised these because he said the profit on them was immense. The shop was repainted, and shelves and cases were put in, and a counter with scales such as are seen at confectioners'. The little inheritance that Poisson held in reserve was seriously encroached upon. But Virginie was triumphant, for she had her way, and the Lorilleuxs did not spare Gervaise the description of a case or a jar.

It was said in the street that Lantier had deserted Gervaise, that she gave him no peace running after him, but this was not true, for he went and came to her apartment as he pleased. Scandal was connecting his name and Virginie's. They said Virginie had taken the clearstarcher's lover as well as her shop! The Lorilleuxs talked of nothing when Gervaise was present but Lantier, Virginie and the shop. Fortunately Gervaise was not inclined to jealousy, and Lantier's infidelities had hitherto left her undisturbed, but she did not accept this new affair with equal tranquillity. She colored or turned pale as she heard these allusions, but she would not allow a word to pass her lips, as she was fully determined never to gratify her enemies by allowing them to see her discomfiture; but a dispute was heard by the neighbors about this time between herself and Lantier, who went angrily away and was not seen by anyone in the Coupeau quarters for more than a fortnight.

Coupeau behaved very oddly. This blind and complacent husband, who had closed his eyes to all that was going on at home, was filled with virtuous indignation at Lantier's indifference. Then Coupeau went so far as to tease Gervaise in regard to this desertion of her lovers. She had had bad luck, he said, with hatters and blacksmiths—why did she not try a mason?

He said this as if it were a joke, but Gervaise had a firm conviction that he was in deadly earnest. A man who is tipsy from one year's end to the next is not apt to be fastidious, and there are husbands who at twenty are very jealous and at thirty have grown very complacent under the influence of constant tippling.

Lantier preserved an attitude of calm indifference. He kept the peace between the Poissons and the Coupeaus. Thanks to him, Virginie and Gervaise affected for each other the most tender regard. He ruled the brunette as he had ruled the blonde, and he would swallow her shop as he had that of Gervaise.

It was in June of this year that Nana partook of her first Communion. She was about thirteen, slender and tall as an asparagus plant, and her air and manner were the height of impertinence and audacity.

She had been sent away from the catechism class the year before on account of her bad conduct. And if the curé did not make a similar objection this year it was because he feared she would never come again and that his refusal would launch on the Parisian *pavé* another castaway.

Nana danced with joy at the mere thought of what the Lorilleuxs—as her

godparents—had promised, while Mme Lerat gave the veil and cup, Virginie the purse and Lantier a prayer book, so that the Coupeaus looked forward to the day without anxiety.

The Poissons—probably through Lantier's advice—selected this occasion for their housewarming. They invited the Coupeaus and the Boche family, as Pauline made her first Communion on that day, as well as Nana.

The evening before, while Nana stood in an ecstasy of delight before her presents, her father came in in an abominable condition. His virtuous resolutions had yielded to the air of Paris; he had fallen into evil ways again, and he now assailed his wife and child with the vilest epithets, which did not seem to shock Nana, for they could fall from her tongue on occasion with facile glibness.

"I want my soup," cried Coupeau, "and you two fools are chattering over those fal-lals! I tell you, I will sit on them if I am not waited upon, and quickly too."

Gervaise answered impatiently, but Nana, who thought it better taste just then—all things considered—to receive with meekness all her father's abuse, dropped her eyes and did not reply.

"Take that rubbish away!" he cried with growing impatience. "Put it out of my sight or I will tear it to bits."

Nana did not seem to hear him. She took up the tulle cap and asked her mother what it cost, and when Coupeau tried to snatch the cap Gervaise pushed him away.

"Let the child alone!" she said. "She is doing no harm!"

Then her husband went into a perfect rage:

"Mother and daughter," he cried, "a nice pair they make. I understand very well what all this row is for: it is merely to show yourself in a new gown. I will put you in a bag and tie it close round your throat, and you will see if the curé likes that!"

Nana turned like lightning to protect her treasures. She looked her father full in the face, and, forgetting the lessons taught her by her priest, she said in a low, concentrated voice:

"Beast!" That was all.

After Coupeau had eaten his soup he fell asleep and in the morning woke quite amiable. He admired his daughter and said she looked quite like a young lady in her white robe. Then he added with a sentimental air that a father on such days was naturally proud of his child. When they were ready to go to the church and Nana met Pauline in the corridor, she examined the latter from head to foot and smiled condescendingly on seeing that Pauline had not a particle of chic.

The two families started off together, Nana and Pauline in front, each with her prayer book in one hand and with the other holding down her veil, which swelled in the wind like a sail. They did not speak to each other but keenly enjoyed seeing the shopkeepers run to their doors to see them, keeping their eyes cast down devoutly but their ears wide open to any compliment they might hear.

Nana's two aunts walked side by side, exchanging their opinions in regard to Gervaise, whom they stigmatized as an irreligious ne'er-do-well whose child would never have gone to the Holy Communion if it had depended on her.

At the church Coupeau wept all the time. It was very silly, he knew, but he could not help it. The voice of the curé was pathetic; the little girls looked like white-robed angels; the organ thrilled him, and the incense gratified his senses. There was one especial anthem which touched him deeply. He was not the only person who wept, he was glad to see, and when the ceremony was over he left the church feeling that it was the happiest day of his life. But an hour later he quarreled with Lorilleux in a wineshop because the latter was so hard-hearted.

The housewarming at the Poissons' that night was very gay. Lantier sat between Gervaise and Virginie and was equally civil and attentive to both. Opposite was Poisson with his calm, impassive face, a look he had cultivated since he began his career as a police officer.

But the queens of the fete were the two little girls, Nana and Pauline, who sat very erect lest they should crush and deface their pretty white dresses. At dessert there was a serious discussion in regard to the future of the children. Mme Boche said that Pauline would at once enter a certain manufactory, where she would receive five or six francs per week. Gervaise had not decided yet, for Nana had shown no especial leaning in any direction. She had a good deal of taste, but she was butter-fingered and careless.

"I should make a florist of her," said Mme Lerat. "It is clean work and pretty work too."

Whereupon ensued a warm discussion. The men were especially careful of their language out of deference to the little girls, but Mme Lerat would not accept the lesson: she flattered herself she could say what she pleased in such a way that it could not offend the most fastidious ears.

Women, she declared, who followed her trade were more virtuous than others. They rarely made a slip.

"I have no objection to your trade," interrupted Gervaise. "If Nana likes to make flowers let her do so. Say, Nana, would you like it?"

The little girl did not look up from her plate, into which she was dipping a crust of bread. She smiled faintly as she replied:

"Yes, Mamma; if you desire it I have no objection."

The decision was instantly made, and Coupeau wished his sister to take her the very next day to the place where she herself worked, Rue du Caire, and the circle talked gravely of the duties of life. Boche said that Pauline and Nana were now women, since they had been to Communion, and they ought to be serious and learn to cook and to mend. They alluded to their future marriages, their homes and their children, and the girls touched each other under the table, giggled and grew very red. Lantier asked them if they did not have little husbands already, and Nana blushing confessed that she loved Victor Fauconnier and never meant to marry anyone else.

Mme Lorilleux said to Mme Boche on their way home:

"Nana is our goddaughter now, but if she goes into that flower business, in six months she will be on the *pavé*, and we will have nothing to do with her."

Gervaise told Boche that she thought the shop admirably arranged. She had looked forward to an evening of torture and was surprised that she had not experienced a pang.

Nana, as she undressed, asked her mother if the girl on the next floor, who had been married the week before, wore a dress of muslin like hers.

But this was the last bright day in that household. Two years passed away, and their prospects grew darker and their demoralization and degradation more evident. They went without food and without fire, but never without brandy.

They found it almost impossible to meet their rent, and a certain January came when they had not a penny, and Father Boche ordered them to leave.

It was frightfully cold, with a sharp wind blowing from the north.

M. Marescot appeared in a warm overcoat and his hands encased in warm woolen gloves and told them they must go, even if they slept in the gutter. The whole house was oppressed with woe, and a dreary sound of lamentation arose from most of the rooms, for half the tenants were behindhand. Gervaise sold her bed and paid the rent. Nana made nothing as yet, and Gervaise had so fallen off in her work that Mme Fauconnier had reduced her wages. She was irregular in her hours and often absented herself from the shop for several days together but was none the less vexed to discover that her old employée, Mme Putois, had been placed above her. Naturally at the end of the week Gervaise had little money coming to her.

As to Coupeau, if he worked he brought no money home, and his wife had ceased to count upon it. Sometimes he declared he had lost it through a hole in his pocket or it had been stolen, but after a while he ceased to make any excuses.

But if he had no cash in his pockets it was because he had spent it all in drink. Mme Boche advised Gervaise to watch for him at the door of the place where he was employed and get his wages from him before he had spent them all, but this did no good, as Coupeau was warned by his friends and escaped by a rear door.

The Coupeaus were entirely to blame for their misfortunes, but this is just what people will never admit. It is always ill luck or the cruelty of God or anything, in short, save the legitimate result of their own vices.

Gervaise now quarreled with her husband incessantly. The warmth of affection of husband and wife, of parents for their children and children for their parents had fled and left them all shivering, each apart from the other.

All three, Coupeau, Gervaise and Nana, watched each other with eyes of baleful hate. It seemed as if some spring had broken—the great mainspring that binds families together.

Gervaise did not shudder when she saw her husband lying drunk in the gutter. She would not have pushed him in, to be sure, but if he were out of the way it would be a good thing for everybody. She even went so far as to say one day in a fit of rage that she would be glad to see him brought home

on a shutter. Of what good was he to any human being? He ate and he drank and he slept. His child learned to hate him, and she read the accidents in the papers with the feelings of an unnatural daughter. What a pity it was that her father had not been the man who was killed when that omnibus tipped over!

In addition to her own sorrows and privations, Gervaise, whose heart was not yet altogether hard, was condemned to hear now of the sufferings of others. The corner of the house in which she lived seemed to be consecrated to those who were as poor as herself. No smell of cooking filled the air, which, on the contrary, was laden with the shrill cries of hungry children, heavy with the sighs of weary, heartbroken mothers and with the oaths of drunken husbands and fathers.

Gervaise pitied Father Bru from the bottom of her heart; he lay the greater part of the time rolled up in the straw in his den under the staircase leading to the roof. When two or three days elapsed without his showing himself someone opened the door and looked in to see if he were still alive.

Yes, he was living; that is, he was not dead. When Gervaise had bread she always remembered him. If she had learned to hate men because of her husband her heart was still tender toward animals, and Father Bru seemed like one to her. She regarded him as a faithful old dog. Her heart was heavy within her whenever she thought of him, alone, abandoned by God and man, dying by inches or drying, rather, as an orange dries on the chimney piece.

Gervaise was also troubled by the vicinity of the undertaker Bazonge—a wooden partition alone separated their rooms. When he came in at night she could hear him throw down his glazed hat, which fell with a dull thud, like a shovelful of clay, on the table. The black cloak hung against the wall rustled like the wings of some huge bird of prey. She could hear his every movement, and she spent most of her time listening to him with morbid horror, while he—all unconscious—hummed his vulgar songs and tipsily staggered to his bed, under which the poor woman's sick fancy pictured a dead body concealed.

She had read in some paper a dismal tale of some undertaker who took home with him coffin after coffin—children's coffins—in order to make one trip to the cemetery suffice. When she heard his step the whole corridor was pervaded to her senses with the odor of dead humanity.

She would as lief have resided at Père-Lachaise and watched the moles at their work. The man terrified her; his incessant laughter dismayed her. She talked of moving but at the same time was reluctant to do so, for there was a strange fascination about Bazonge after all. Had he not told her once that he would come for her and lay her down to sleep in the shadow of waving branches, where she would know neither hunger nor toil?

She wished she could try it for a month. And she thought how delicious it would be in midwinter, just at the time her quarter's rent was due. But, alas, this was not possible! The rest and the sleep must be eternal; this thought chilled her, and her longing for death faded away before the unrelenting severity of the bonds exacted by Mother Earth.

One night she was sick and feverish, and instead of throwing herself out of the window as she was tempted to do, she rapped on the partition and called loudly:

"Father Bazonge! Father Bazonge!"

The undertaker was kicking off his slippers, singing a vulgar song as he did so.

"What is the matter?" he answered.

But at his voice Gervaise awoke as from a nightmare. What had she done? Had she really tapped? she asked herself, and she recoiled from his side of the wall in chill horror. It seemed to her that she felt the undertaker's hands on her head. No! No! She was not ready. She told herself that she had not intended to call him. It was her elbow that had knocked the wall accidentally, and she shivered from head to foot at the idea of being carried away in this man's arms.

"What is the matter?" repeated Bazonge. "Can I serve you in any way, madame?"

"No! No! It is nothing!" answered the laundress in a choked voice. "I am very much obliged."

While the undertaker slept she lay wide awake, holding her breath and not daring to move, lest he should think she called him again.

She said to herself that under no circumstances would she ever appeal to him for assistance, and she said this over and over again with the vain hope of reassuring herself, for she was by no means at ease in her mind.

Gervaise had before her a noble example of courage and fortitude in the Bijard family. Little Lalie, that tiny child—about as big as a pinch of salt—swept and kept her room like wax; she watched over the two younger children with all the care and patience of a mother. This she had done since her father had kicked her mother to death. She had entirely assumed that mother's place, even to receiving the blows which had fallen formerly on that poor woman. It seemed to be a necessity of his nature that when he came home drunk he must have some woman to abuse. Lalie was too small, he grumbled; one blow of his fist covered her whole face, and her skin was so delicate that the marks of his five fingers would remain on her cheek for days!

He would fly at her like a wolf at a poor little kitten for the merest trifle. Lalie never answered, never rebelled and never complained. She merely tried to shield her face and suppressed all shrieks, lest the neighbors should come; her pride could not endure that. When her father was tired kicking her about the room she lay where he left her until she had strength to rise, and then she went steadily about her work, washing the children and making her soup, sweeping and dusting until everything was clean. It was a part of her plan of life to be beaten every day.

Gervaise had conceived a strong affection for this little neighbor. She treated her like a woman who knew something of life. It must be admitted that Lalie was large for her years. She was fair and pale, with solemn eyes for her years and had a delicate mouth. To have heard her talk one would have thought her thirty. She could make and mend, and she talked of the children as if she had

herself brought them into the world. She made people laugh sometimes when she talked, but more often she brought tears to their eyes.

Gervaise did everything she could for her, gave her what she could and helped the energetic little soul with her work. One day she was altering a dress of Nana's for her, and when the child tried it on Gervaise was chilled with horror at seeing her whole back purple and bruised, the tiny arm bleeding—all the innocent flesh of childhood martyred by the brute—her father.

Bazonge might get the coffin ready, she thought, for the little girl could not bear this long. But Lalie entreated her friend to say nothing, telling her that her father did not know what he was doing, that he had been drinking. She forgave him with her whole heart, for madmen must not be held accountable for their deeds. After that Gervaise was on the watch whenever she heard Bijard coming up the stairs. But she never caught him in any act of absolute brutality. Several times she had found Lalie tied to the foot of the bedstead—an idea that had entered her father's brain, no one knew why, a whim of his disordered brain, disordered by liquor, which probably arose from his wish to tyrannize over the child, even when he was no longer there.

Lalie sometimes was left there all day and once all night. When Gervaise insisted on untying her the child entreated her not to touch the knots, saying that her father would be furious if he found the knots had been tampered with.

And really, she said with an angelic smile, she needed rest, and the only thing that troubled her was not to be able to put the room in order. She could watch the children just as well, and she could think, so that her time was not entirely lost. When her father let her free, her sufferings were not over, for it was sometimes more than an hour before she could stand—before the blood circulated freely in her stiffened limbs.

Her father had invented another cheerful game. He heated some sous red hot on the stove and laid them on the chimney piece. He then summoned Lalie and bade her go buy some bread. The child unsuspectingly took up the sous, uttered a little shriek and dropped them, shaking her poor burned fingers.

Then he would go off in a rage. What did she mean by such nonsense? She had thrown away the money and lost it, and he threatened her with a hiding if she did not find the money instantly. The poor child hesitated; he gave her a cuff on the side of the head. With silent tears streaming down her cheeks she would pick up the sous and toss them from hand to hand to cool them as she went down the long flights of stairs.

There was no limit to the strange ingenuity of the man. One afternoon, for example, Lalie had completed playing with the children. The window was open, and the air shook the door so that it sounded like gentle raps.

"It is Mr Wind," said Lalie; "come in, Mr Wind. How are you today?"

And she made a low curtsy to Mr Wind. The children did the same in high glee, and she was quite radiant with happiness, which was not often the case.

"Come in, Mr Wind!" she repeated, but the door was pushed open by a rough hand and Bijard entered. Then a sudden change came over the scene. The two children crouched in a corner, while Lalie stood in the center of the

floor, frozen stiff with terror, for Bijard held in his hand a new whip with a long and wicked-looking lash. He laid this whip on the bed and did not kick either one of the children but smiled in the most vicious way, showing his two lines of blackened, irregular teeth. He was very drunk and very noisy.

"What is the matter with you fools? Have you been struck dumb? I heard you all talking and laughing merrily enough before I came in. Where are your tongues now? Here! Take off my shoes!"

Lalie, considerably disheartened at not having received her customary kick, turned very pale as she obeyed. He was sitting on the side of the bed. He lay down without undressing and watched the child as she moved about the room. Troubled by this strange conduct, the child ended by breaking a cup. Then without disturbing himself he took up the whip and showed it to her.

"Look here, fool," he said grimly: "I bought this for you, and it cost me fifty sous, but I expect to get a good deal more than fifty sous' worth of good out of it. With this long lash I need not run about after you, for I can reach you in every corner of the room. You will break the cups, will you? Come, now, jump about a little and say good morning to Mr Wind again!"

He did not even sit up in the bed but, with his head buried in the pillow, snapped the whip with a noise like that made by a postilion. The lash curled round Lalie's slender body; she fell to the floor, but he lashed her again and compelled her to rise.

"This is a very good thing," he said coolly, "and saves my getting chilled on cold mornings. Yes, I can reach you in that corner—and in that! Skip now! Skip!"

A light foam was on his lips, and his suffused eyes were starting from their sockets. Poor little Lalie darted about the room like a terrified bird, but the lash tingled over her shoulders, coiled around her slender legs and stung like a viper. She was like an India-rubber ball bounding from the floor, while her beast of a father laughed aloud and asked her if she had had enough.

The door opened and Gervaise entered. She had heard the noise. She stood aghast at the scene and then was seized with noble rage.

"Let her be!" she cried. "I will go myself and summon the police."

Bijard growled like an animal who is disturbed over his prey.

"Why do you meddle?" he exclaimed. "What business is it of yours?"

And with another adroit movement he cut Lalie across the face. The blood gushed from her lip. Gervaise snatched a chair and flew at the brute, but the little girl held her skirts and said it did not hurt much; it would be over soon, and she washed the blood away, speaking gently to the frightened children.

When Gervaise thought of Lalie she was ashamed to complain. She wished she had the courage of this child. She knew that she had lived on dry bread for weeks and that she was so weak she could hardly stand, and the tears came to the woman's eyes as she saw the precocious mite who had known nothing of the innocent happiness of her years. And Gervaise took this slender creature for example, whose eyes alone told the story of her misery and hardships, for in the Coupeau family the vitriol of the Assommoir was doing its work of destruction. Gervaise had seen a whip. Gervaise had learned

to dread it, and this dread inspired her with tenderest pity for Lalie. Coupeau had lost the flesh and the bloated look which had been his, and he was thin and emaciated. His complexion was gradually acquiring a leaden hue. His appetite was utterly gone. It was with difficulty that he swallowed a mouthful of bread. His stomach turned against all solid food, but he took his brandy every day. This was his meat as well as his drink, and he touched nothing else.

When he crawled out of his bed in the morning he stood for a good fifteen minutes, coughing and spitting out a bitter liquid that rose in his throat and choked him.

He did not feel any better until he had taken what he called "a good drink," and later in the day his strength returned. He felt strange prickings in the skin of his hands and feet. But lately his limbs had grown heavy. This pricking sensation gave place to the most excruciating cramps, which he did not find very amusing. He rarely laughed now but often stopped short and stood still on the sidewalk, troubled by a strange buzzing in his ears and by flashes of light before his eyes. Everything looked yellow to him; the houses seemed to be moving away from him. At other times, when the sun was full on his back, he shivered as if a stream of ice water had been poured down between his shoulders. But the thing he liked the least about himself was a nervous trembling in his hands, the right hand especially.

Had he become an old woman then? he asked himself with sudden fury. He tried with all his strength to lift his glass and command his nerves enough to hold it steady. But the glass had a regular tremulous movement from right to left and left to right again, in spite of all his efforts.

Then he emptied it down his throat, saying that when he had swallowed a dozen more he would be all right and as steady as a monument. Gervaise told him, on the contrary, that he must leave off drinking if he wished to leave off trembling.

He grew very angry and drank quarts in his eagerness to test the question, finally declaring that it was the passing omnibusses that jarred the house and shook his hand.

In March Coupeau came in one night drenched to the skin. He had been caught out in a shower. That night he could not sleep for coughing. In the morning he had a high fever, and the physician who was sent for advised Gervaise to send him at once to the hospital.

And Gervaise made no objection; once she had refused to trust her husband to these people, but now she consigned him to their tender mercies without a regret; in fact, she regarded it as a mercy.

Nevertheless, when the litter came she turned very pale and, if she had had even ten francs in her pocket, would have kept him at home. She walked to the hospital by the side of the litter and went into the ward where he was placed. The room looked to her like a miniature *Père-Lachaise*, with its rows of beds on either side and its path down the middle. She went slowly away, and in the street she turned and looked up. How well she remembered when Coupeau was at work on those gutters, cheerily singing in the morning air! He did not drink in those days, and she, at her window in the *Hôtel Boncœur*,

had watched his athletic form against the sky, and both had waved their handkerchiefs. Yes, Coupeau had worked more than a year on this hospital, little thinking that he was preparing a place for himself. Now he was no longer on the roof—he had built a dismal nest within. Good God, was she and the once-happy wife and mother one and the same? How long ago those days seemed!

The next day when Gervaise went to make inquiries she found the bed empty. A sister explained that her husband had been taken to the asylum of Sainte-Anne, because the night before he had suddenly become unmanageable from delirium and had uttered such terrible howls that it disturbed the inmates of all the beds in that ward. It was the alcohol in his system, she said, which attacked his nerves now, when he was so reduced by the inflammation on his lungs that he could not resist it.

The clearstarcher went home, but how or by what route she never knew. Her husband was mad—she heard these words reverberating through her brain. Life was growing very strange. Nana simply said that he must, of course, be left at the asylum, for he might murder them both.

On Sunday only could Gervaise go to Sainte-Anne. It was a long distance off. Fortunately there was an omnibus which went very near. She got out at La Rue Santé and bought two oranges that she might not go quite empty-handed.

But when she went in, to her astonishment she found Coupeau sitting up. He welcomed her gaily.

"You are better!" she exclaimed.

"Yes, nearly well," he replied, and they talked together awhile, and she gave him the oranges, which pleased and touched him, for he was a different man now that he drank tisane instead of liquor. She did not dare allude to his delirium, but he spoke of it himself.

"Yes," he said, "I was in a pretty state! I saw rats running all over the floor and the walls, and you were calling me, and I saw all sorts of horrible things! But I am all right now. Once in a while I have a bad dream, but everybody does, I suppose."

Gervaise remained with him until night. When the house surgeon made his rounds at six o'clock he told him to hold out his hands. They scarcely trembled—an almost imperceptible motion of the tips of his fingers was all. But as the room grew darker Coupeau became restless. Two or three times he sat up and peered into the remote corners.

Suddenly he stretched out his arms and seemed to crush some creature on the wall.

"What is it?" asked Gervaise, terribly frightened.

"Rats!" he said quietly. "Only rats!"

After a long silence he seemed to be dropping off to sleep, with disconnected sentences falling from his lips.

"Dirty beasts! Look out, one is under your skirts!" He pulled the covering hastily over his head, as if to protect himself against the creature he saw.

Then starting up in mad terror, he screamed aloud. A nurse ran to the bed, and Gervaise was sent away, mute with horror at this scene.

But when on the following Sunday she went again to the hospital, Coupeau was really well. All his dreams had vanished. He slept like a child, ten hours without lifting a finger. His wife, therefore, was allowed to take him away. The house surgeon gave him a few words of advice before he left, assuring him if he continued to drink he would be a dead man in three months. All depended on himself. He could live at home just as he had lived at Sainte-Anne's and must forget that such things as wine and brandy existed.

"He is right," said Gervaise as they took their seats in the omnibus.

"Of course he is right," answered her husband. But after a moment's silence he added:

"But then, you know, a drop of brandy now and then never hurts a man: it aids digestion."

That very evening he took a tiny drop and for a week was very moderate; he had no desire, he said, to end his days at Bicêtre. But he was soon off his guard, and one day his little drop ended in a full glass, to be followed by a second, and so on. At the end of a fortnight he had fallen back in the old rut.

Gervaise did her best, but, after all, what can a wife do in such circumstances?

She had been so startled by the scene at the asylum that she had fully determined to begin a regular life again and hoped that he would assist her and do the same himself. But now she saw that there was no hope, that even the knowledge of the inevitable results could not restrain her husband now.

Then the hell on earth began again; hopeless and intolerant, Nana asked indignantly why he had not remained in the asylum. All the money she made, she said, should be spent in brandy for her father, for the sooner it was ended, the better for them all.

Gervaise blazed out one day when he lamented his marriage and told him that it was for her to curse the day when she first saw him. He must remember that she had refused him over and over again. The scene was a frightful one and one unexampled in the Coupeau annals.

Gervaise, now utterly discouraged, grew more indolent every day. Her room was rarely swept. The Lorilleuxs said they could not enter it, it was so dirty. They talked all day long over their work of the downfall of Wooden Legs. They gloated over her poverty and her rags.

"Well! Well!" they murmured. "A great change has indeed come to that beautiful blonde who was so fine in her blue shop."

Gervaise suspected their comments on her and her acts to be most unkind, but she determined to have no open quarrel. It was for her interest to speak to them when they met, but that was all the intercourse between them.

On Saturday Coupeau had told his wife he would take her to the circus; he had earned a little money and insisted on indulging himself. Nana was obliged to stay late at the place where she worked and would sleep with her aunt Mme Lerat.

Seven o'clock came, but no Coupeau. Her husband was drinking with his comrades probably. She had washed a cap and mended an old gown with the

hope of being presentable. About nine o'clock, in a towering rage, she sallied forth on an empty stomach to find Coupeau.

"Are you looking for your husband?" said Mme Boche. "He is at the Assommoir. Boche has just seen him there."

Gervaise muttered her thanks and went with rapid steps to the Assommoir.

A fine rain was falling. The gas in the tavern was blazing brightly, lighting up the mirrors, the bottles and glasses. She stood at the window and looked in. He was sitting at a table with his comrades. The atmosphere was thick with smoke, and he looked stupefied and half asleep.

She shivered and wondered why she should stay there and, so thinking, turned away, only to come back twice to look again.

The water lay on the uneven sidewalk in pools, reflecting all the lights from the Assommoir. Finally she determined on a bold step: she opened the door and deliberately walked up to her husband. After all, why should she not ask him why he had not kept his promise of taking her to the circus? At any rate, she would not stay out there in the rain and melt away like a cake of soap.

"She is crazy!" said Coupeau when he saw her. "I tell you, she is crazy!"

He and all his friends shrieked with laughter, but no one condescended to say what it was that was so very droll. Gervaise stood still, a little bewildered by this unexpected reception. Coupeau was so amiable that she said:

"Come, you know it is not too late to see something."

"Sit down a minute," said her husband, not moving from his seat.

Gervaise saw she could not stand there among all those men, so she accepted the offered chair. She looked at the glasses, whose contents glittered like gold. She looked at these dirty, shabby men and at the others crowding around the counter. It was very warm, and the pipe smoke thickened the air.

Gervaise felt as if she were choking; her eyes smarted, and her head was heavy with the fumes of alcohol. She turned around and saw the still, the machine that created drunkards. That evening the copper was dull and glittered only in one round spot. The shadows of the apparatus on the wall behind were strange and weird—creatures with tails, monsters opening gigantic jaws as if to swallow the whole world.

"What will you take to drink?" said Coupeau.

"Nothing," answered his wife. "You know I have had no dinner!"

"You need it all the more then! Have a drop of something!"

As she hesitated Mes-Bottes said gallantly:

"The lady would like something sweet like herself."

"I like men," she answered angrily, "who do not get tipsy and talk like fools! I like men who keep their promises!"

Her husband laughed.

"You had better drink your share," he said, "for the devil a bit of a circus will you see tonight."

She looked at him fixedly. A heavy frown contracted her eyebrows. She answered slowly:

"You are right; it is a good idea. We can drink up the money together."

Bibi brought her a glass of anisette. As she sipped it she remembered all

at once the brandied fruit she had eaten in the same place with Coupeau when he was courting her. That day she had left the brandy and took only the fruit, and now she was sitting there drinking liqueur.

But the anisette was good. When her glass was empty she refused another, and yet she was not satisfied.

She looked around at the infernal machine behind her—a machine that should have been buried ten fathoms deep in the sea. Nevertheless, it had for her a strange fascination, and she longed to quench her thirst with that liquid fire.

"What is that you have in your glasses?" she asked.

"That, my dear," answered her husband, "is Father Colombe's own especial brew. Taste it."

And when a glass of the vitriol was brought to her Coupeau bade her swallow it down, saying it was good for her.

After she had drunk this glass Gervaise was no longer conscious of the hunger that had tormented her. Coupeau told her they could go to the circus another time, and she felt she had best stay where she was. It did not rain in the Assommoir, and she had come to look upon the scene as rather amusing. She was comfortable and sleepy. She took a third glass and then put her head on her folded arms, supporting them on the table, and listened to her husband and his friends as they talked.

Behind her the still was at work with constant drip-drip, and she felt a mad desire to grapple with it as with some dangerous beast and tear out its heart. She seemed to feel herself caught in those copper fangs and fancied that those coils of pipe were wound around her own body, slowly but surely crushing out her life.

The whole room danced before her eyes, for Gervaise was now in the condition which had so often excited her pity and indignation with others. She vaguely heard a quarrel arise and a crash of chairs and tables, and then Father Colombe promptly turned everyone into the street.

It was still raining and a cold, sharp wind blowing. Gervaise lost Coupeau, found him and then lost him again. She wanted to go home, but she could not find her way. At the corner of the street she took her seat by the side of the gutter, thinking herself at her washtub. Finally she got home and endeavored to walk straight past the door of the concierge, within whose room she was vaguely conscious of the Poissons and Lorilleuxs holding up their hands in disgust at her condition.

She never knew how she got up those six flights of stairs. But when she turned into her own corridor little Lalie ran toward her with loving, extended arms.

"Dear Madame Gervaise," she cried, "Papa has not come in; please come and see my children. They are sleeping so sweetly!"

But when she looked up in the face of the clearstarcher she recoiled, trembling from head to foot. She knew only too well that alcoholic smell, those wandering eyes and convulsed lips.

Then as Gervaise staggered past her without speaking the child's arms fell at her side, and she looked after her friend with sad and solemn eyes.

CHAPTER XI

LITTLE NANA

NANA WAS GROWING FAST—fair, fresh and dimpled—her skin velvety, like a peach, and eyes so bright that men often asked her if they might not light their pipes at them. Her mass of blonde hair—the color of ripe wheat—looked around her temples as if it were powdered with gold. She had a quaint little trick of sticking out the tip of her tongue between her white teeth, and this habit, for some reason, exasperated her mother.

She was very fond of finery and very coquettish. In this house, where bread was not always to be got, it was difficult for her to indulge her caprices in the matter of costume, but she did wonders. She brought home odds and ends of ribbons from the shop where she worked and made them up into bows and knots with which she ornamented her dirty dresses. She was not overparticular in washing her feet, but she wore her boots so tight that she suffered martyrdom in honor of St Crispin, and if anyone asked her what the matter was when the pain flushed her face suddenly, she always and promptly laid it to the score of the colic.

Summer was the season of her triumphs. In a calico dress that cost five or six francs she was as fresh and sweet as a spring morning and made the dull street radiant with her youth and her beauty. She went by the name of "The Little Chicken." One gown, in particular, suited her to perfection. It was white with rose-colored dots, without trimming of any kind. The skirt was short and showed her feet. The sleeves were very wide and displayed her arms to the elbows. She turned the neck away and fastened it with pins—in a corner in the corridor, dreading her father's jests—to exhibit her pretty rounded throat. A rose-colored ribbon, knotted in the rippling masses of her hair, completed her toilet. She was a charming combination of child and woman.

Sundays at this period of her life were her days for coquetting with the public. She looked forward to them all the week through with a longing for liberty and fresh air.

Early in the morning she began her preparations and stood for hours in her chemise before the bit of broken mirror nailed by the window, and as everyone could see her, her mother would be very much vexed and ask how long she intended to show herself in that way.

But she, quite undisturbed, went on fastening down the little curls on her forehead with a little sugar and water and then sewed the buttons on her boots or took a stitch or two in her frock, barefooted all this time and with her chemise slipping off her rounded shoulders.

Her father declared he would exhibit her as the "Wild Girl," at two sous a head.

She was very lovely in this scanty costume, the color flushing her cheeks

in her indignation at her father's sometimes coarse remarks. She did not dare answer him, however, but bit off her thread in silent rage. After breakfast she went down to the courtyard. The house was wrapped in Sunday quiet; the workshops on the lower floor were closed. Through some of the open windows the tables were seen laid for dinners, the families being on the fortifications "getting an appetite."

Five or six girls—Nana, Pauline and others—lingered in the courtyard for a time and then took flight altogether into the streets and thence to the outer boulevards. They walked in a line, filling up the whole sidewalk, with ribbons fluttering in their uncovered hair.

They managed to see everybody and everything through their downcast lids. The streets were their native heath, as it were, for they had grown up in them.

Nana walked in the center and gave her arm to Pauline, and as they were the oldest and tallest of the band, they gave the law to the others and decided where they should go for the day and what they should do.

Nana and Pauline were deep ones. They did nothing without premeditation. If they ran it was to show their slender ankles, and when they stopped and panted for breath it was sure to be at the side of some youths—young workmen of their acquaintance—who smoked in their faces as they talked. Nana had her favorite, whom she always saw at a great distance—Victor Fauconnier—and Pauline adored a young cabinetmaker, who gave her apples.

Toward sunset the great pleasure of the day began. A band of mountebanks would spread a well-worn carpet, and a circle was formed to look on. Nana and Pauline were always in the thickest of the crowd, their pretty fresh dresses crushed between dirty blouses, but insensible to the mingled odors of dust and alcohol, tobacco and dirt. They heard vile language; it did not disturb them; it was their own tongue—they heard little else. They listened to it with a smile, their delicate cheeks unflushed.

The only thing that disturbed them was the appearance of their fathers, particularly if these fathers seemed to have been drinking. They kept a good lookout for this disaster.

"Look!" cried Pauline. "Your father is coming, Nana."

Then the girl would crouch on her knees and bid the others stand close around her, and when he had passed on after an inquiring look she would jump up and they would all utter peals of laughter.

But one day Nana was kicked home by her father, and Boche dragged Pauline away by her ear.

The girls would ordinarily return to the courtyard in the twilight and establish themselves there with the air of not having been away, and each invented a story with which to greet their questioning parents. Nana now received forty sous per day at the place where she had been apprenticed. The Coupeaus would not allow her to change, because she was there under the supervision of her aunt, Mme Lerat, who had been employed for many years in the same establishment.

The girl went off at an early hour in her little black dress, which was too

short and too tight for her, and Mme Lerat was bidden, whenever she was after her time, to inform Gervaise, who allowed her just twenty minutes, which was quite long enough. But she was often seven or eight minutes late, and she spent her whole day coaxing her aunt not to tell her mother. Mme Lerat, who was fond of the girl and understood the follies of youth, did not tell, but at the same time she read Nana many a long sermon on her follies and talked of her own responsibility and of the dangers a young girl ran in Paris.

"You must tell me everything," she said. "I am too indulgent to you, and if evil should come of it I should throw myself into the Seine. Understand me, my little kitten; if a man should speak to you you must promise to tell me every word he says. Will you swear to do this?"

Nana laughed an equivocal little laugh. Oh yes, she would promise. But men never spoke to her; she walked too fast for that. What could they say to her? And she explained her irregularity in coming—her five or ten minutes delay—with an innocent little air. She had stopped at a window to look at pictures or she had stopped to talk to Pauline. Her aunt might follow her if she did not believe her.

"Oh, I will watch her. You need not be afraid!" said the widow to her brother. "I will answer for her, as I would for myself!"

The place where the aunt and niece worked side by side was a large room with a long table down the center. Shelves against the wall were piled with boxes and bundles—all covered with a thick coating of dust. The gas had blackened the ceiling. The two windows were so large that the women, seated at the table, could see all that was going on in the street below.

Mme Lerat was the first to make her appearance in the morning, but in another fifteen minutes all the others were there. One morning in July Nana came in last, which, however, was the usual case.

"I shall be glad when I have a carriage!" she said as she ran to the window without even taking off her hat—a shabby little straw.

"What are you looking at?" asked her aunt suspiciously. "Did your father come with you?"

"No indeed," answered Nana carelessly; "nor am I looking at anything. It is awfully warm, and of all things in the world, I hate to be in a hurry."

The morning was indeed frightfully hot. The workwomen had closed the blinds, leaving a crack, however, through which they could inspect the street, and they took their seats on each side of the table—Mme Lerat at the farther end. There were eight girls, four on either side, each with her little pot of glue, her pincers and other tools; heaps of wires of different lengths and sizes lay on the table, spools of cotton and of different-colored papers, petals and leaves cut out of silk, velver and satin. In the center, in a goblet, one of the girls had placed a two-sou bouquet, which was slowly withering in the heat.

"Did you know," said Léonie as she picked up a rose leaf with her pincers, "how wretched poor Caroline is with that fellow who used to call for her regularly every night?"

Before anyone could answer Léonie added:

"Hush! Here comes Madame."

And in sailed Mme Titreville, a tall, thin woman, who usually remained below in the shop. Her employees stood in dread terror of her, as she was never known to smile. She went from one to another, finding fault with all; she ordered one woman to pull a marguerite to pieces and make it over and then went out as stiffly and silently as she had come in.

"Houp! Houp!" said Nana under her breath, and a giggle ran round the table.

"Really, young ladies," said Mme Lerat, "you will compel me to severe measures."

But no one was listening, and no one feared her. She was very tolerant. They could say what they pleased, provided they put it in decent language.

Nana was certainly in a good school! Her instincts, to be sure, were vicious, but these instincts were fostered and developed in this place, as is too often the case when a crowd of girls are herded together. It was the story of a basket of apples, the good ones spoiled by those that were already rotten. If two girls were whispering in a corner, ten to one they were telling some story that could not be told aloud.

Nana was not yet thoroughly perverted, but the curiosity which had been her distinguishing characteristic as a child had not deserted her, and she scarcely took her eyes from a girl by the name of Lisa, about whom strange stories were told.

"How warm it is!" she exclaimed, suddenly rising and pushing open the blinds. Léonie saw a man standing on the sidewalk opposite.

"Who is that old fellow?" she said. "He has been there a full quarter of an hour."

"Some fool who has nothing better to do, I suppose," said Mme Lerat. "Nana, will you come back to your work? I have told you that you should not go to that window."

Nana took up her violets, and they all began to watch this man. He was well dressed, about fifty, pale and grave. For a full hour he watched the windows.

"Look!" said Léonie. "He has an eyeglass. Oh, he is very chic. He is waiting for Augustine." But Augustine sharply answered that she did not like the old man.

"You make a great mistake then," said Mme Lerat with her equivocal smile.

Nana listened to the conversation which followed—reveling in indecency—as much at home in it as a fish is in water. All the time her fingers were busy at work. She wound her violet stems and fastened in the leaves with a slender strip of green paper. A drop of gum—and then behold a bunch of delicate fresh verdure which would fascinate any lady. Her fingers were especially deft by nature. No instruction could have imparted this quality.

The gentleman had gone away, and the workshop settled down into quiet once more. When the bell rang for twelve Nana started up and said she would go out and execute any commissions. Léonie sent for two sous' worth of shrimp, Augustine for some fried potatoes, Sophie for a sausage and Lisa for a bunch of radishes. As she was going out, her aunt said quietly:

"I will go with you. I want something."

Lo, in the lane running up by the shop was the mysterious stranger. Nana turned very red, and her aunt drew her arm within her own and hurried her along.

So then he had come for her! Was not this pretty behavior for a girl of her age? And Mme Lerat asked question after question, but Nana knew nothing of him, she declared, though he had followed her for five days.

Mme Lerat looked at the man out of the corners of her eyes. "You must tell me everything," she said.

While they talked they went from shop to shop, and their arms grew full of small packages, but they hurried back, still talking of the gentleman.

"It may be a good thing," said Mme Lerat, "if his intentions are only honorable."

The workwomen ate their breakfast on their knees; they were in no hurry, either, to return to their work, when suddenly Léonie uttered a low hiss, and like magic each girl was busy. Mme Titreville entered the room and again made her rounds.

Mme Lerat did not allow her niece after this day to set foot on the street without her. Nana at first was inclined to rebel, but, on the whole, it rather flattered her vanity to be guarded like a treasure. They had discovered that the man who followed her with such persistency was a manufacturer of buttons, and one night the aunt went directly up to him and told him that he was behaving in a most improper manner. He bowed and, turning on his heel, departed—not angrily, by any means—and the next day he did as usual.

One day, however, he deliberately walked between the aunt and the niece and said something to Nana in a low voice. This frightened Mme Lerat, who went at once to her brother and told him the whole story, whereupon he flew into a violent rage, shook the girl until her teeth chattered and talked to her as if she were the vilest of the vile.

"Let her be!" said Gervaise with all a woman's sense. "Let her be! Don't you see that you are putting all sorts of things into her head?"

And it was quite true; he had put ideas into her head and had taught her some things she did not know before, which was very astonishing. One morning he saw her with something in a paper. It was *poudre de riz*, which, with a most perverted taste, she was plastering upon her delicate skin. He rubbed the whole of the powder into her hair until she looked like a miller's daughter. Another time she came in with red ribbons to retrim her old hat; he asked her furiously where she got them.

Whenever he saw her with a bit of finery her father flew at her with insulting suspicion and angry violence. She defended herself and her small possessions with equal violence. One day he snatched from her a little cornelian heart and ground it to dust under his heel.

She stood looking on, white and stern; for two years she had longed for this heart. She said to herself that she would not bear such treatment long. Coupeau occasionally realized that he had made a mistake, but the mischief was done.

He went every morning with Nana to the shop door and waited outside for five minutes to be sure that she had gone in. But one morning, having stopped to talk with a friend on the corner for some time, he saw her come out again and vanish like a flash around the corner. She had gone up two flights higher than the room where she worked and had sat down on the stairs until she thought him well out of the way.

When he went to Mme Lerat she told him that she washed her hands of the whole business; she had done all she could, and now he must take care of his daughter himself. She advised him to marry the girl at once or she would do worse.

All the people in the neighborhood knew Nana's admirer by sight. He had been in the courtyard several times, and once he had been seen on the stairs.

The Lorilleuxs threatened to move away if this sort of thing went on, and Mme Boche expressed great pity for this poor gentleman whom this scamp of a girl was leading by the nose.

At first Nana thought the whole thing a great joke, but at the end of a month she began to be afraid of him. Often when she stopped before the jeweler's he would suddenly appear at her side and ask her what she wanted.

She did not care so much for jewelry or ornaments as she did for many other things. Sometimes as the mud was spattered over her from the wheels of a carriage she grew faint and sick with envious longings to be better dressed, to go to the theater, to have a pretty room all to herself. She longed to see another side of life, to know something of its pleasures. The stranger invariably appeared at these moments, but she always turned and fled, so great was her horror of him.

But when winter came existence became well-nigh intolerable. Each evening Nana was beaten, and when her father was tired of this amusement her mother scolded. They rarely had anything to eat and were always cold. If the girl bought some trifling article of dress it was taken from her.

No! This life could not last. She no longer cared for her father. He had thoroughly disgusted her, and now her mother drank too. Gervaise went to the Assommoir nightly—for her husband, she said—and remained there. When Nana saw her mother sometimes as she passed the window, seated among a crowd of men, she turned livid with rage, because youth has little patience with the vice of intemperance. It was a dreary life for her—a comfortless home and a drunken father and mother. A saint on earth could not have remained there; that she knew very well, and she said she would make her escape some fine day, and then perhaps her parents would be sorry and would admit that they had pushed her out of the nest.

One Saturday Nana, coming in, found her mother and father in a deplorable condition—Coupeau lying across the bed and Gervaise sitting in a chair, swaying to and fro. She had forgotten the dinner, and one untrimmed candle lighted the dismal scene.

"Is that you, girl?" stammered Gervaise. "Well, your father will settle with you!"

Nana did not reply. She looked around the cheerless room, at the cold stove,

at her parents. She did not step across the threshold. She turned and went away.

And she did not come back! The next day when her father and mother were sober, they each reproached the other for Nana's flight.

This was really a terrible blow to Gervaise, who had no longer the smallest motive for self-control, and she abandoned herself at once to a wild orgy that lasted three days. Coupeau gave his daughter up and smoked his pipe quietly. Occasionally, however, when eating his dinner, he would snatch up a knife and wave it wildly in the air, crying out that he was dishonored and then, laying it down as suddenly, resumed eating his soup.

In this great house, whence each month a girl or two took flight, this incident astonished no one. The Lorilleuxs were rather triumphant at the success of their prophecy. Lantier defended Nana.

"Of course," he said, "she has done wrong, but bless my heart, what would you have? A girl as pretty as that could not live all her days in such poverty!"

"You know nothing about it!" cried Mme Lorilleux one evening when they were all assembled in the room of the concierge. "Wooden Legs sold her daughter out and out. I know it! I have positive proof of what I say. The time that the old gentleman was seen on the stairs he was going to pay the money. Nana and he were seen together at the Ambigu the other night! I tell you, I know it!"

They finished their coffee. This tale might or might not be true; it was not improbable, at all events. And after this it was circulated and generally believed in the *Quartier* that Gervaise had sold her daughter.

The clearstarcher, meanwhile, was going from bad to worse. She had been dismissed from Mme Fauconnier's and in the last few weeks had worked for eight laundresses, one after the other—dismissed from all for her untidiness.

As she seemed to have lost all skill in ironing, she went out by the day to wash and by degrees was entrusted with only the roughest work. This hard labor did not tend to beautify her either. She continued to grow stouter and stouter in spite of her scanty food and hard labor.

Her womanly pride and vanity had all departed. Lantier never seemed to see her when they met by chance, and she hardly noticed that the liaison which had stretched along for so many years had ended in a mutual disenchantment.

Lantier had done wisely, so far as he was concerned, in counseling Virginie to open the kind of shop she had. He adored sweets and could have lived on pralines and gumdrops, sugarplums and chocolate.

Sugared almonds were his especial delight. For a year his principal food was bonbons. He opened all the jars, boxes and drawers when he was left alone in the shop; and often, with five or six persons standing around, he would take off the cover of a jar on the counter and put in his hand and crunch down an almond. The cover was not put on again, and the jar was soon empty. It was a habit of his, they all said; besides, he was subject to a tickling in his throat!

He talked a great deal to Poisson of an invention of his which was worth a fortune—an umbrella and hat in one; that is to say, a hat which, at the first drops of a shower, would expand into an umbrella.

Lantier suggested to Virginie that she should have Gervaise come in once each week to wash the floors, shop and the rooms. This she did and received thirty sous each time. Gervaise appeared on Saturday mornings with her bucket and brush, without seeming to suffer a single pang at doing this menial work in the house where she had lived as mistress.

One Saturday Gervaise had hard work. It had rained for three days, and all the mud of the streets seemed to have been brought into the shop. Virginie stood behind the counter with collar and cuffs trimmed with lace. Near her on a low chair lounged Lantier, and he was, as usual, eating candy.

"Really, Madame Coupeau," cried Virginie, "can't you do better than that? You have left all the dirt in the corners. Don't you see? Oblige me by doing that over again."

Gervaise obeyed. She went back to the corner and scrubbed it again. She was on her hands and knees, with her sleeves rolled up over her arms. Her old skirt clung close to her stout form, and the sweat poured down her face.

"The more elbow grease she uses, the more she shines," said Lantier sentimentously with his mouth full.

Virginie, leaning back in her chair with the air of a princess, followed the progress of the work with half-closed eyes.

"A little more to the right. Remember, those spots must all be taken out. Last Saturday, you know, I was not pleased."

And then Lantier and Virginie fell into a conversation, while Gervaise crawled along the floor in the dirt at their feet.

Mme Poisson enjoyed this, for her cat's eyes sparkled with malicious joy, and she glanced at Lantier with a smile. At last she was avenged for that mortification at the lavatory, which had for years weighed heavy on her soul.

"By the way," said Lantier, addressing himself to Gervaise, "I saw Nana last night."

Gervaise started to her feet with her brush in her hand.

"Yes, I was coming down La Rue des Martyrs. In front of me was a young girl on the arm of an old gentleman. As I passed I glanced at her face and assure you that it was Nana. She was well dressed and looked happy."

"Ah!" said Gervaise in a low, dull voice.

Lantier, who had finished one jar, now began another.

"What a girl that is!" he continued. "Imagine that she made me a sign to follow with the most perfect self-possession. She got rid of her old gentleman in a café and beckoned me to the door. She asked me to tell her about everybody."

"Ah!" repeated Gervaise.

She stood waiting. Surely this was not all. Her daughter must have sent her some especial message. Lantier ate his sugarplums.

"I would not have looked at her," said Virginie. "I sincerely trust, if I should meet her, that she would not speak to me for, really, it would mortify me beyond expression. I am sorry for you, Madame Gervaise, but the truth is that Poisson arrests every day a dozen just such girls."

Gervaise said nothing; her eyes were fixed on vacancy. She shook her head slowly, as if in reply to her own thoughts.

"Pray make haste," exclaimed Virginie fretfully. "I do not care to have this scrubbing going on until midnight."

Gervaise returned to her work. With her two hands clasped around the handle of the brush she pushed the water before her toward the door. After this she had only to rinse the floor after sweeping the dirty water into the gutter.

When all was accomplished she stood before the counter waiting for her money. When Virginie tossed it toward her she did not take it up instantly.

"Then she said nothing else?" Gervaise asked.

"She?" Lantier exclaimed. "Who is she? Ah yes, I remember. Nana! No, she said nothing more."

And Gervaise went away with her thirty sous in her hand, her skirts dripping and her shoes leaving the mark of their broad soles on the sidewalk.

In the *Quartier* all the women who drank like her took her part and declared she had been driven to intemperance by her daughter's misconduct. She, too, began to believe this herself and assumed at times a tragic air and wished she were dead. Unquestionably she had suffered from Nana's departure. A mother does not like to feel that her daughter will leave her for the first person who asks her to do so.

But she was too thoroughly demoralized to care long, and soon she had but one idea: that Nana belonged to her. Had she not a right to her own property?

She roamed the streets day after day, night after night, hoping to see the girl. That year half the *Quartier* was being demolished. All one side of the Rue des Poissonniers lay flat on the ground. Lantier and Poisson disputed day after day on these demolitions. The one declared that the emperor wanted to build palaces and drive the lower classes out of Paris, while Poisson, white with rage, said the emperor would pull down the whole of Paris merely to give work to the people.

Gervaise did not like the improvements, either, or the changes in the dingy *Quartier*, to which she was accustomed. It was, in fact, a little hard for her to see all these embellishments just when she was going downhill so fast over the piles of brick and mortar, while she was wandering about in search of Nana.

She heard of her daughter several times. There are always plenty of people to tell you things you do not care to hear. She was told that Nana had left her elderly friend for the sake of some young fellow.

She heard, too, that Nana had been seen at a ball in the Grand Salon, Rue de la Chapelle, and Coupeau and she began to frequent all these places, one after another, whenever they had the money to spend.

But at the end of a month they had forgotten Nana and went for their own pleasure. They sat for hours with their elbows on a table, which shook with the movements of the dancers, amused by the sight.

One November night they entered the Grand Salon, as much to get warm as anything else. Outside it was hailing, and the rooms were naturally crowded. They could not find a table, and they stood waiting until they could establish

themselves. Coupeau was directly in the mouth of the passage, and a young man in a frock coat was thrown against him. The youth uttered an exclamation of disgust as he began to dust off his coat with his handkerchief. The blouse worn by Coupeau was assuredly none of the cleanest.

"Look here, my good fellow," cried Coupeau angrily, "those airs are very unnecessary. I would have you to know that the blouse of a workingman can do your coat no harm if it has touched it!"

The young man turned around and looked at Coupeau from head to foot.

"Learn," continued the angry workman, "that the blouse is the only wear for a man!"

Gervaise endeavored to calm her husband, who, however, tapped his ragged breast and repeated loudly:

"The only wear for a man, I tell you!"

The youth slipped away and was lost in the crowd.

Coupeau tried to find him, but it was quite impossible; the crowd was too great. The orchestra was playing a quadrille, and the dancers were bringing up the dust from the floor in great clouds, which obscured the gas.

"Look!" said Gervaise suddenly.

"What is it?"

"Look at that velvet bonnet!"

Quite at the left there was a velvet bonnet, black with plumes, only too suggestive of a hearse. They watched these nodding plumes breathlessly.

"Do you not know that hair?" murmured Gervaise hoarsely. "I am sure it is she!"

In one second Coupeau was in the center of the crowd. Yes, it was Nana, and in what a costume! She wore a ragged silk dress, stained and torn. She had no shawl over her shoulders to conceal the fact that half the buttonholes on her dress were burst out. In spite of all her shabbiness the girl was pretty and fresh. Nana, of course, danced on unsuspiciously. Her airs and graces were beyond belief. She curtsied to the very ground and then in a twinkling threw her foot over her partner's head. A circle was formed, and she was applauded vociferously.

At this moment Coupeau fell on his daughter.

"Don't try and keep me back," he said, "for have her I will!"

Nana turned and saw her father and mother.

Coupeau discovered that his daughter's partner was the young man for whom he had been looking. Gervaise pushed him aside and walked up to Nana and gave her two cuffs on her ears. One sent the plumed hat on the side; the other left five red marks on that pale cheek. The orchestra played on. Nana neither wept nor moved.

The dancers began to grow very angry. They ordered the Coupeau party to leave the room.

"Go," said Gervaise, "and do not attempt to leave us, for so sure as you do you will be given in charge of a policeman."

The young man had prudently disappeared.

Nana's old life now began again, for after the girl had slept for twelve hours

on a stretch, she was very gentle and sweet for a week. She wore a plain gown and a simple hat and declared she would like to work at home. She rose early and took a seat at her table by five o'clock the first morning and tried to roll her violet stems, but her fingers had lost their cunning in the six months in which they had been idle.

Then the gluepot dried up; the petals and the paper were dusty and spotted; the mistress of the establishment came for her tools and materials and made more than one scene. Nana relapsed into utter indolence, quarreling with her mother from morning until night. Of course an end must come to this, so one fine evening the girl disappeared.

The Lorilleuxs, who had been greatly amused by the repentance and return of their niece, now nearly died laughing. If she returned again they would advise the Coupeaus to put her in a cage like a canary.

The Coupeaus pretended to be rather pleased, but in their hearts they raged, particularly as they soon learned that Nana was frequently seen in the *Quartier*. Gervaise declared this was done by the girl to annoy them.

Nana adorned all the balls in the vicinity, and the Coupeaus knew that they could lay their hands on her at any time they chose, but they did not choose and they avoided meeting her.

But one night, just as they were going to bed, they heard a rap on the door. It was Nana, who came to ask as coolly as possible if she could sleep there. What a state she was in! All rags and dirt. She devoured a crust of dried bread and fell asleep with a part of it in her hand. This continued for some time, the girl coming and going like a will-o'-the-wisp. Weeks and months would elapse without a sign from her, and then she would reappear without a word to say where she had been, sometimes in rags and sometimes well dressed. Finally her parents began to take these proceedings as a matter of course. She might come in, they said, or stay out, just as she pleased, provided she kept the door shut. Only one thing exasperated Gervaise now, and that was when her daughter appeared with a bonnet and feathers and a train. This she would not endure. When Nana came to her it must be as a simple workingwoman! None of this dearly bought finery should be exhibited there, for these trained dresses had created a great excitement in the house.

One day Gervaise reproached her daughter violently for the life she led and finally, in her rage, took her by the shoulder and shook her.

"Let me be!" cried the girl. "You are the last person to talk to me in that way. You did as you pleased. Why can't I do the same?"

"What do you mean?" stammered the mother.

"I have never said anything about it because it was none of my business, but do you think I did not know where you were when my father lay snoring? Let me alone. It was you who set me the example."

Gervaise turned away pale and trembling, while Nana composed herself to sleep again.

Coupeau's life was a very regular one—that is to say, he did not drink for six months and then yielded to temptation, which brought him up with a round turn and sent him to Sainte-Anne's. When he came out he did the same thing, so

that in three years he was seven times at Sainte-Anne's, and each time he came out the fellow looked more broken and less able to stand another orgy.

The poison had penetrated his entire system. He had grown very thin; his cheeks were hollow and his eyes inflamed. Those who knew his age shuddered as they saw him pass, bent and decrepit as a man of eighty. The trembling of his hands had so increased that some days he was obliged to use them both in raising his glass to his lips. This annoyed him intensely and seemed to be the only symptom of his failing health which disturbed him. He sometimes swore violently at these unruly members and at others sat for hours looking at these fluttering hands as if trying to discover by what strange mechanism they were moved. And one night Gervaise found him sitting in this way with great tears pouring down his withered cheeks.

The last summer of his life was especially trying to Coupeau. His voice was entirely changed; he was deaf in one ear, and some days he could not see and was obliged to feel his way up- and downstairs as if he were blind. He suffered from maddening headaches, and sudden pains would dart through his limbs, causing him to snatch at a chair for support. Sometimes after one of these attacks his arm would be paralyzed for twenty-four hours.

He would lie in bed with even his head wrapped up, silent and moody, like some suffering animal. Then came incipient madness and fever—tearing everything to pieces that came in his way—or he would weep and moan, declaring that no one loved him, that he was a burden to his wife. One evening when his wife and daughter came in he was not in his bed; in his place lay the **bolster** carefully tucked in. They found him at last crouched on the floor under the bed, with his teeth chattering with cold and fear. He told them he had been attacked by assassins.

The two women coaxed him back to bed as if he had been a baby.

Coupeau knew but one remedy for all this, and that was a good stout morning dram. His memory had long since fled; his brain had softened. When Nana appeared after an absence of six weeks he thought she had been on an errand around the corner. She met him in the street, too, very often now, without fear, for he passed without recognizing her. One night in the autumn Nana went out, saying she wanted some baked pears from the fruiterer's. She felt the cold weather coming on, and she did not care to sit before a cold stove. The winter before she went out for two sous' worth of tobacco and came back in a month's time; they thought she would do the same now, but they were mistaken. Winter came and went, as did the spring, and even when June arrived they had seen and heard nothing of her.

She was evidently comfortable somewhere, and the Coupeaus, feeling certain that she would never return, had sold her bed; it was very much in their way, and they could drink up the six francs it brought.

One morning Virginie called to Gervaise as the latter passed the shop and begged her to come in and help a little, as Lantier had had two friends to supper the night before, and Gervaise washed the dishes while Lantier sat in the shop smoking. Presently he said:

"Oh, Gervaise, I saw Nana the other night."

Virginie, who was behind the counter, opening and shutting drawer after drawer, with a face that lengthened as she found each empty, shook her fist at him indignantly.

She had begun to think he saw Nana very often. She did not speak, but Mme Lerat, who had just come in, said with a significant look:

"And where did you see her?"

"Oh, in a carriage," answered Lantier with a laugh. "And I was on the sidewalk." He turned toward Gervaise and went on:

"Yes, she was in a carriage, dressed beautifully. I did not recognize her at first, but she kissed her hand to me. Her friend this time must be a vicomte at the least. She looked as happy as a queen."

Gervaise wiped the plate in her hands, rubbing it long and carefully, though it had long since been dry. Virginie, with wrinkled brows, wondered how she could pay two notes which fell due the next day, while Lantier, fat and hearty from the sweets he had devoured, asked himself if these drawers and jars would be filled up again or if the ruin he anticipated was so near at hand that he would be compelled to pull up stakes at once. There was not another praline for him to crunch, not even a gumdrop.

When Gervaise went back to her room she found Coupeau sitting on the side of the bed, weeping and moaning. She took a chair near by and looked at him without speaking.

"I have news for you," she said at last. "Your daughter has been seen. She is happy and comfortable. Would that I were in her place!"

Coupeau was looking down on the floor intently. He raised his head and said with an idiotic laugh:

"Do as you please, my dear; don't let me be any hindrance to you. When you are dressed up you are not so bad looking after all."

CHAPTER XII

POVERTY AND DEGRADATION

THE WEATHER was intensely cold about the middle of January. Gervaise had not been able to pay her rent, due on the first. She had little or no work and consequently no food to speak of. The sky was dark and gloomy and the air heavy with the coming of a storm. Gervaise thought it barely possible that her husband might come in with a little money. After all, everything is possible, and he had said that he would work. Gervaise after a little, by dint of dwelling on this thought, had come to consider it a certainty. Yes, Coupeau would bring home some money, and they would have a good, hot, comfortable dinner. As to herself, she had given up trying to get work, for no one would have her. This did not much trouble her, however, for she had arrived at that point when the mere exertion of moving had become intolerable to her. She now lay stretched on the bed, for she was warmer there.

Gervaise called it a bed. In reality it was only a pile of straw in the corner, for she had sold her bed and all her furniture. She occasionally swept the straw

together with a broom, and, after all, it was neither dustier nor dirtier than everything else in the place. On this straw, therefore, Gervaise now lay with her eyes wide open. How long, she wondered, could people live without eating? She was not hungry, but there was a strange weight at the pit of her stomach. Her haggard eyes wandered about the room in search of anything she could sell. She vaguely wished someone would buy the spider webs which hung in all the corners. She knew them to be very good for cuts, but she doubted if they had any market value.

Tired of this contemplation, she got up and took her one chair to the window and looked out into the dingy courtyard.

Her landlord had been there that day and declared he would wait only one week for his money, and if it were not forthcoming he would turn them into the street. It drove her wild to see him stand in his heavy overcoat and tell her so coldly that he would pack her off at once. She hated him with a vindictive hatred, as she did her fool of a husband and the Lorilleuxs and Poissons. In fact, she hated everyone on that especial day.

Unfortunately people can't live without eating, and before the woman's famished eyes floated visions of food. Not of dainty little dishes. She had long since ceased to care for those and ate all she could get without being in the least fastidious in regard to its quality. When she had a little money she bought a bullock's heart or a bit of cheese or some beans, and sometimes she begged from a restaurant and made a sort of panada of the crusts they gave her, which she cooked on a neighbor's stove. She was quite willing to dispute with a dog for a bone. Once the thought of such things would have disgusted her, but at that time she did not—for three days in succession—go without a morsel of food. She remembered how last week Coupeau had stolen a half loaf of bread and sold it, or rather exchanged it, for liquor.

She sat at the window, looking at the pale sky, and finally fell asleep. She dreamed that she was out in a snowstorm and could not find her way home. She awoke with a start and saw that night was coming on. How long the days are when one's stomach is empty! She waited for Coupeau and the relief he would bring.

The clock struck in the next room. Could it be possible? Was it only three? Then she began to cry. How could she ever wait until seven? After another half-hour of suspense she started up. Yes, they might say what they pleased, but she, at least, would try to borrow ten sous from the Lorilleuxs.

There was a continual borrowing of small sums in this corridor during the winter, but no matter what was the emergency no one ever dreamed of applying to the Lorilleuxs. Gervaise summoned all her courage and rapped at the door.

"Come in!" cried a sharp voice.

How good it was there! Warm and bright with the glow of the forge. And Gervaise smelled the soup, too, and it made her feel faint and sick.

"Ah, it is you, is it?" said Mme Lorilleux. "What do you want?"

Gervaise hesitated. The application for ten sous stuck in her throat, because she saw Boche seated by the stove.

"What do you want?" asked Lorilleux, in his turn.

"Have you seen Coupeau?" stammered Gervaise. "I thought he was here."

His sister answered with a sneer that they rarely saw Coupeau. They were not rich enough to offer him as many glasses of wine as he wanted in these days.

Gervaise stammered out a disconnected sentence.

He had promised to come home. She needed food; she needed money.

A profound silence followed. Mme Lorilleux fanned her fire, and her husband bent more closely over his work, while Boche smiled with an expectant air.

"If I could have ten sous," murmured Gervaise.

The silence continued.

"If you would lend them to me," said Gervaise, "I would give them back in the morning."

Mme Lorilleux turned and looked her full in the face, thinking to herself that if she yielded once the next day it would be twenty sous, and who could tell where it would stop?

"But, my dear," she cried, "you know we have no money and no prospect of any; otherwise, of course, we would oblige you."

"Certainly," said Lorilleux, "the heart is willing, but the pockets are empty."

Gervaise bowed her head, but she did not leave instantly. She looked at the gold wire on which her sister-in-law was working and at that in the hands of Lorilleux and thought that it would take a mere scrap to give her a good dinner. On that day the room was very dirty and filled with charcoal dust, but she saw it resplendent with riches like the shop of a money-changer, and she said once more in a low, soft voice:

"I will bring back the ten sous. I will, indeed!" Tears were in her eyes, but she was determined not to say that she had eaten nothing for twenty-four hours.

"I can't tell you how much I need it," she continued.

The husband and wife exchanged a look. Wooden Legs begging at their door! Well! Well! Who would have thought it? Why had they not known it was she when they rashly called out, "Come in?" Really, they could not allow such people to cross their threshold; there was too much that was valuable in the room. They had several times distrusted Gervaise; she looked about so queerly, and now they would not take their eyes off her.

Gervaise went toward Lorilleux as she spoke.

"Take care!" he said roughly. "You will carry off some of the particles of gold on the soles of your shoes. It looks really as if you had greased them!"

Gervaise drew back. She leaned against the *étagère* for a moment and, seeing that her sister-in-law's eyes were fixed on her hands, she opened them and said in a gentle, weary voice—the voice of a woman who had ceased to struggle:

"I have taken nothing. You can look for yourself."

And she went away; the warmth of the place and the smell of the soup were unbearable.

The Lorilleuxs shrugged their shoulders as the door closed. They hoped they had seen the last of her face. She had brought all her misfortunes on her own

head, and she had, therefore, no right to expect any assistance from them. Boche joined in these animadversions, and all three considered themselves avenged for the blue shop and all the rest.

"I know her!" said Mme Lorilleux. "If I had lent her the ten sous she wanted she would have spent it in liquor."

Gervaise crawled down the corridor with slipshod shoes and slouching shoulders, but at her door she hesitated; she could not go in: she was afraid. She would walk up and down a little—that would keep her warm. As she passed she looked in at Father Bru, but to her surprise he was not there, and she asked herself with a pang of jealousy if anyone could possibly have asked him out to dine. When she reached the Bijards' she heard a groan. She went in.

"What is the matter?" she said.

The room was very clean and in perfect order. Lalie that very morning had swept and arranged everything. In vain did the cold blast of poverty blow through that chamber and bring with it dirt and disorder. Lalie was always there; she cleaned and scrubbed and gave to everything a look of gentility. There was little money but much cleanliness within those four walls.

The two children were cutting out pictures in a corner, but Lalie was in bed, lying very straight and pale, with the sheet pulled over her chin.

"What is the matter?" asked Gervaise anxiously.

Lalie slowly lifted her white lids and tried to speak.

"Nothing," she said faintly; "nothing, I assure you!" Then as her eyes closed she added:

"I am only a little lazy and am taking my ease."

But her face bore the traces of such frightful agony that Gervaise fell on her knees by the side of the bed. She knew that the child had had a cough for a month, and she saw the blood trickling from the corners of her mouth.

"It is not my fault," Lalie murmured. "I thought I was strong enough, and I washed the floor. I could not finish the windows though. Everything but those are clean. But I was so tired that I was obliged to lie down—"

She interrupted herself to say:

"Please see that my children are not cutting themselves with the scissors."

She started at the sound of a heavy step on the stairs. Her father noisily pushed open the door. As usual he had drunk too much, and in his eyes blazed the lurid flames kindled by alcohol.

When he saw Lalie lying down he walked to the corner and took up the long whip, from which he slowly unwound the lash.

"This is a good joke!" he said. "The idea of your daring to go to bed at this hour. Come, up with you!"

He snapped the whip over the bed, and the child murmured softly:

"Do not strike me, Papa. I am sure you will be sorry if you do. Do not strike me!"

"Up with you!" he cried. "Up with you!"

Then she answered faintly:

"I cannot, for I am dying."

Gervaise had snatched the whip from Bijard, who stood with his under jaw

dropped, glaring at his daughter. What could the little fool mean? Whoever heard of a child dying like that when she had not even been sick? Oh, she was lying!

"You will see that I am telling you the truth," she replied. "I did not tell you as long as I could help it. Be kind to me now, Papa, and say good-by as if you loved me."

Bijard passed his hand over his eyes. She did look very strangely—her face was that of a grown woman. The presence of death in that cramped room sobered him suddenly. He looked around with the air of a man who had been suddenly awakened from a dream. He saw the two little ones clean and happy and the room neat and orderly.

He fell into a chair.

"Dear little mother!" he murmured. "Dear little mother!"

This was all he said, but it was very sweet to Lalie, who had never been spoiled by overpraise. She comforted him. She told him how grieved she was to go away and leave him before she had entirely brought up her children. He would watch over them, would he not? And in her dying voice she gave him some little details in regard to their clothes. He—the alcohol having regained its power—listened with round eyes of wonder.

After a long silence Lalie spoke again:

"We owe four francs and seven sous to the baker. He must be paid. Madame Goudron has an iron that belongs to us; you must not forget it. This evening I was not able to make the soup, but there are bread and cold potatoes."

As long as she breathed the poor little mite continued to be the mother of the family. She died because her breast was too small to contain so great a heart, and that he lost this precious treasure was entirely her father's fault. He, wretched creature, had kicked her mother to death and now, just as surely, murdered his daughter.

Gervaise tried to keep back her tears. She held Lalie's hands, and as the bedclothes slipped away she rearranged them. In doing so she caught a glimpse of the poor little figure. The sight might have drawn tears from a stone. Lalie wore only a tiny chemise over her bruised and bleeding flesh; marks of a lash striped her sides; a livid spot was on her right arm, and from head to foot she was one bruise.

Gervaise was paralyzed at the sight. She wondered, if there were a God above, how He could have allowed the child to stagger under so heavy a cross.

"Madame Coupeau," murmured the child, trying to draw the sheet over her. She was ashamed, ashamed for her father.

Gervaise could not stay there. The child was fast sinking. Her eyes were fixed on her little ones, who sat in the corner, still cutting out their pictures. The room was growing dark, and Gervaise fled from it. Ah, what an awful thing life was! And how gladly would she throw herself under the wheels of an omnibus, if that might end it!

Almost unconsciously Gervaise took her way to the shop where her husband worked or, rather, pretended to work. She would wait for him and get the money before he had a chance to spend it.

It was a very cold corner where she stood. The sounds of the carriages and footsteps were strangely muffled by reason of the fast-falling snow. Gervaise stamped her feet to keep them from freezing. The people who passed offered few distractions, for they hurried by with their coat collars turned up to their ears. But Gervaise saw several women watching the door of the factory quite as anxiously as herself—they were wives who, like herself, probably wished to get hold of a portion of their husbands' wages. She did not know them, but it required no introduction to understand their business.

The door of the factory remained firmly shut for some time. Then it opened to allow the egress of one workman; then two, three, followed, but these were probably those who, well behaved, took their wages home to their wives, for they neither retreated nor started when they saw the little crowd. One woman fell on a pale little fellow and, plunging her hand into his pocket, carried off every sou of her husband's earnings, while he, left without enough to pay for a pint of wine, went off down the street almost weeping.

Some other men appeared, and one turned back to warn a comrade, who came gamely and fearlessly out, having put his silver pieces in his shoes. In vain did his wife look for them in his pockets; in vain did she scold and coax—he had no money, he declared.

Then came another noisy group, elbowing each other in their haste to reach a cabaret, where they could drink away their week's wages. These fellows were followed by some shabby men who were swearing under their breath at the trifle they had received, having been tipsy and absent more than half the week.

But the saddest sight of all was the grief of a meek little woman in black, whose husband, a tall, good-looking fellow, pushed her roughly aside and walked off down the street with his boon companions, leaving her to go home alone, which she did, weeping her very heart out as she went.

Gervaise still stood watching the entrance. Where was Coupeau? She asked some of the men, who teased her by declaring that he had just gone by the back door. She saw by this time that Coupeau had lied to her, that he had not been at work that day. She also saw that there was no dinner for her. There was not a shadow of hope—nothing but hunger and darkness and cold.

She toiled up La Rue des Poissonniers when she suddenly heard Coupeau's voice and, glancing in at the window of a wineshop, she saw him drinking with Mes-Bottes, who had had the luck to marry the previous summer a woman with some money. He was now, therefore, well clothed and fed and altogether a happy mortal and had Coupeau's admiration. Gervaise laid her hands on her husband's shoulders as he left the cabaret.

"I am hungry," she said softly.

"Hungry, are you? Well then, eat your fist and keep the other for to-morrow."

"Shall I steal a loaf of bread?" she asked in a dull, dreary tone.

Mes-Bottes smoothed his chin and said in a conciliatory voice:

"No, no! Don't do that; it is against the law. But if a woman manages—"

Coupeau interrupted him with a coarse laugh.

Yes, a woman, if she had any sense, could always get along, and it was her own fault if she starved.

And the two men walked on toward the outer boulevard. Gervaise followed them. Again she said:

"I am hungry. You know I have had nothing to eat. You must find me something."

He did not answer, and she repeated her words in a tone of agony.

"Good God!" he exclaimed, turning upon her furiously. "What can I do? I have nothing. Be off with you, unless you want to be beaten."

He lifted his fist; she recoiled and said with set teeth:

"Very well then; I will go and find some man who has a sou."

Coupeau pretended to consider this an excellent joke. Yes of course she could make a conquest; by gaslight she was still passably goodlooking. If she succeeded he advised her to dine at the Capucin, where there was very good eating.

She turned away with livid lips; he called after her:

"Bring some dessert with you, for I love cake. And perhaps you can induce your friend to give me an old coat, for I swear it is cold tonight."

Gervaise, with this infernal mirth ringing in her ears, hurried down the street. She was determined to take this desperate step. She had only a choice between that and theft, and she considered that she had a right to dispose of herself as she pleased. The question of right and wrong did not present itself very clearly to her eyes. "When one is starving is hardly the time," she said to herself, "to philosophize." She walked slowly up and down the boulevard. This part of Paris was crowded now with new buildings, between whose sculptured façades ran narrow lanes leading to haunts of squalid misery, which were cheek by jowl with splendor and wealth.

It seemed strange to Gervaise that among this crowd who elbowed her there was not one good Christian to divine her situation and slip some sous into her hand. Her head was dizzy, and her limbs would hardly bear her weight. At this hour ladies with hats and well-dressed gentlemen who lived in these fine new houses were mingled with the people—with the men and women whose faces were pale and sickly from the vitiated air of the workshops in which they passed their lives. Another day of toil was over, but the days came too often and were too long. One hardly had time to turn over in one's sleep when the everlasting grind began again.

Gervaise went with the crowd. No one looked at her, for the men were all hurrying home to their dinner. Suddenly she looked up and beheld the Hôtel Boncœur. It was empty, the shutters and doors covered with placards and the whole façade weather-stained and decaying. It was there in that hotel that the seeds of her present life had been sown. She stood still and looked up at the window of the room she had occupied and recalled her youth passed with Lantier and the manner in which he had left her. But she was young then and soon recovered from the blow. That was twenty years ago, and now what was she?

The sight of the place made her sick, and she turned toward Montmartre. She passed crowds of workwomen with little parcels in their hands and chil-

dren who had been sent to the baker's, carrying four-pound loaves of bread as tall as themselves, which looked like shining brown dolls.

By degrees the crowd dispersed, and Gervaise was almost alone. Everyone was at dinner. She thought how delicious it would be to lie down and never rise again—to feel that all toil was over. And this was the end of her life! Gervaise, amid the pangs of hunger, thought of some of the fete days she had known and remembered that she had not always been miserable. Once she was pretty, fair and fresh. She had been a kind and admired mistress in her shop. Gentlemen came to it only to see her, and she vaguely wondered where all this youth and this beauty had fled.

Again she looked up; she had reached the abattoirs, which were now being torn down; the fronts were taken away, showing the dark holes within, the very stones of which reeked with blood. Farther on was the hospital with its high, gray walls, with two wings opening out like a huge fan. A door in the wall was the terror of the whole *Quartier*—the Door of the Dead, it was called—through which all the bodies were carried.

She hurried past this solid oak door and went down to the railroad bridge, under which a train had just passed, leaving in its rear a floating cloud of smoke. She wished she were on that train which would take her into the country, and she pictured to herself open spaces and the fresh air and expanse of blue sky; perhaps she could live a new life there.

As she thought this her weary eyes began to puzzle out in the dim twilight the words on a printed handbill pasted on one of the pillars of the arch. She read one—an advertisement offering fifty francs for a lost dog. Someone must have loved the creature very much.

Gervaise turned back again. The street lamps were being lit and defined long lines of streets and avenues. The restaurants were all crowded, and people were eating and drinking. Before the Assommoir stood a crowd waiting their turn and room within, and as a respectable tradesman passed he said with a shake of the head that many a man would be drunk that night in Paris. And over this scene hung the dark sky, low and clouded.

Gervaise wished she had a few sous: she would, in that case, have gone into this place and drunk until she ceased to feel hungry, and through the window she watched the still with an angry consciousness that all her misery and all her pain came from that. If she had never touched a drop of liquor all might have been so different.

She started from her reverie; this was the hour of which she must take advantage. Men had dined and were comparatively amiable. She looked around her and toward the trees where—under the leafless branches—she saw more than one female figure. Gervaise watched them, determined to do what they did. Her heart was in her throat; it seemed to her that she was dreaming a bad dream.

She stood for some fifteen minutes; none of the men who passed looked at her. Finally she moved a little and spoke to one who, with his hands in his pockets, was whistling as he walked.

"Sir," she said in a low voice, "please listen to me."

The man looked at her from head to foot and went on whistling louder than before.

Gervaise grew bolder. She forgot everything except the pangs of hunger. The women under the trees walked up and down with the regularity of wild animals in a cage.

"Sir," she said again, "please listen."

But the man went on. She walked toward the Hôtel Boncœur again, past the hospital, which was now brilliantly lit. There she turned and went back over the same ground—the dismal ground between the slaughterhouses and the place where the sick lay dying. With these two places she seemed to feel bound by some mysterious tie.

"Sir, please listen!"

She saw her shadow on the ground as she stood near a street lamp. It was a grotesque shadow—grotesque because of her ample proportions. Her limp had become, with time and her additional weight, a very decided deformity, and as she moved the lengthening shadow of herself seemed to be creeping along the sides of the houses with bows and curtsies of mock reverence. Never before had she realized the change in herself. She was fascinated by this shadow. It was very droll, she thought, and she wondered if the men did not think so too.

"Sir, please listen!"

It was growing late. Man after man, in a beastly state of intoxication, reeled past her; quarrels and disputes filled the air.

Gervaise walked on, half asleep. She was conscious of little except that she was starving. She wondered where her daughter was and what she was eating, but it was too much trouble to think, and she shivered and crawled on. As she lifted her face she felt the cutting wind, accompanied by the snow, fine and dry, like gravel. The storm had come.

People were hurrying past her, but she saw one man walking slowly. She went toward him.

"Sir, please listen!"

The man stopped. He did not seem to notice what she said but extended his hand and murmured in a low voice:

"Charity, if you please!"

The two looked at each other. Merciful heavens! It was Father Bru begging and Mme Coupeau doing worse. They stood looking at each other—equals in misery. The aged workman had been trying to make up his mind all the evening to beg, and the first person he stopped was a woman as poor as himself! This was indeed the irony of fate. Was it not a pity to have toiled for fifty years and then to beg his bread? To have been one of the most flourishing laundresses in Paris and then to make her bed in the gutter? They looked at each other once more, and without a word each went their own way through the fast-falling snow, which blinded Gervaise as she struggled on, the wind wrapping her thin skirts around her legs so that she could hardly walk.

Suddenly an absolute whirlwind struck her and bore her breathless and helpless along—she did not even know in what direction. When at last she was able to open her eyes she could see nothing through the blinding snow, but she

heard a step and saw the outlines of a man's figure. She snatched him by the blouse.

"Sir," she said, "please listen."

The man turned. It was Goujet.

Ah, what had she done to be thus tortured and humiliated? Was God in heaven an angry God always? This was the last drop of bitterness in her cup. She saw her shadow: her limp, she felt, made her walk like an intoxicated woman, which was indeed hard, when she had not swallowed a drop.

Goujet looked at her while the snow whitened his yellow beard.

"Come!" he said.

And he walked on, she following him. Neither spoke.

Poor Mme Goujet had died in October of acute rheumatism, and her son continued to reside in the same apartment. He had this night been sitting with a sick friend.

He entered, lit a lamp and turned toward Gervaise, who stood humbly on the threshold.

"Come in!" he said in a low voice, as if his mother could have heard him.

The first room was that of Mme Goujet, which was unchanged since her death. Near the window stood her frame, apparently ready for the old lady. The bed was carefully made, and she could have slept there had she returned from the cemetery to spend a night with her son. The room was clean, sweet and orderly.

"Come in," repeated Goujet.

Gervaise entered with the air of a woman who is startled at finding herself in a respectable place. He was pale and trembling. They crossed his mother's room softly, and when Gervaise stood within his own he closed the door.

It was the same room in which he had lived ever since she knew him—small and almost virginal in its simplicity. Gervaise dared not move.

Goujet snatched her in his arms, but she pushed him away faintly.

The stove was still hot, and a dish was on the top of it. Gervaise looked toward it. Goujet understood. He placed the dish on the table, poured her out some wine and cut a slice of bread.

"Thank you," she said. "How good you are!"

She trembled to that degree that she could hardly hold her fork. Hunger gave her eyes the fierceness of a famished beast and to her head the tremulous motion of senility. After eating a potato she burst into tears but continued to eat, with the tears streaming down her cheeks and her chin quivering.

"Will you have some more bread?" he asked. She said no; she said yes; she did not know what she said.

And he stood looking at her in the clear light of the lamp. How old and shabby she was! The heat was melting the snow on her hair and clothing, and water was dripping from all her garments. Her hair was very gray and roughened by the wind. Where was the pretty white throat he so well remembered? He recalled the days when he first knew her, when her skin was so delicate and she stood at her table, briskly moving the hot irons to and fro. He thought of the time when she had come to the forge and of the joy with

which he would have welcomed her then to his room. And now she was there! She finished her bread amid great silent tears and then rose to her feet.

Goujet took her hand.

"I love you, Madame Gervaise; I love you still," he cried.

"Do not say that," she exclaimed, "for it is impossible."

He leaned toward her.

"Will you allow me to kiss you?" he asked respectfully.

She did not know what to say, so great was her emotion.

He kissed her gravely and solemnly and then pressed his lips upon her gray hair. He had never kissed anyone since his mother's death, and Gervaise was all that remained to him of the past.

He turned away and, throwing himself on his bed, sobbed aloud. Gervaise could not endure this. She exclaimed:

"I love you, Monsieur Goujet, and I understand. Farewell!"

And she rushed through Mme Goujet's room and then through the street to her home. The house was all dark, and the arched door into the courtyard looked like huge, gaping jaws. Could this be the house where she once desired to reside? Had she been deaf in those days, not to have heard that wail of despair which pervaded the place from top to bottom? From the day when she first set her foot within the house she had steadily gone downhill.

Yes, it was a frightful way to live—so many people herded together, to become the prey of cholera or vice. She looked at the courtyard and fancied it a cemetery surrounded by high walls. The snow lay white within it. She stepped over the usual stream from the dyer's, but this time the stream was black and opened for itself a path through the white snow. The stream was the color of her thoughts. But she remembered when both were rosy.

As she toiled up the six long flights in the darkness she laughed aloud. She recalled her old dream—to work quietly, have plenty to eat, a little home to herself, where she could bring up her children, never to be beaten, and to die in her bed! It was droll how things had turned out. She worked no more; she had nothing to eat; she lived amid dirt and disorder. Her daughter had gone to the bad, and her husband beat her whenever he pleased. As for dying in her bed, she had none. Should she throw herself out of the window and find one on the pavement below?

She had not been unreasonable in her wishes, surely. She had not asked of heaven an income of thirty thousand francs or a carriage and horses. This was a queer world! And then she laughed again as she remembered that she had once said that after she had worked for twenty years she would retire into the country.

Yes, she would go into the country, for she should soon have her little green corner in Père-Lachaise.

Her poor brain was disturbed. She had bidden an eternal farewell to Goujet. They would never see each other again. All was over between them—love and friendship too.

As she passed the Bijards' she looked in and saw Lalie lying dead, happy and at peace. It was well with the child.

"She is lucky," muttered Gervaise.

At this moment she saw a gleam of light under the undertaker's door. She threw it wide open with a wild desire that he should take her as well as Lalie. Bazonge had come in that night more tipsy than usual and had thrown his hat and cloak in the corner, while he lay in the middle of the floor.

He started up and called out:

"Shut that door! And don't stand there—it is too cold. What do you want?"

Then Gervaise, with arms outstretched, not knowing or caring what she said, began to entreat him with passionate vehemence:

"Oh, take me!" she cried. "I can bear it no longer. Take me, I implore you!"

And she knelt before him, a lurid light blazing in her haggard eyes.

Father Bazonge, with garments stained by the dust of the cemetery, seemed to her as glorious as the sun. But the old man, yet half asleep, rubbed his eyes and could not understand her.

"What are you talking about?" he muttered.

"Take me," repeated Gervaise, more earnestly than before. "Do you remember one night when I rapped on the partition? Afterward I said I did not, but I was stupid then and afraid. But I am not afraid now. Here, take my hands—they are not cold with terror. Take me and put me to sleep, for I have but this one wish now."

Bazonge, feeling that it was not proper to argue with a lady, said:

"You are right. I have buried three women today, who would each have given me a jolly little sum out of gratitude, if they could have put their hands in their pockets. But you see, my dear woman, it is not such an easy thing you are asking of me."

"Take me!" cried Gervaise. "Take me! I want to go away!"

"But there is a certain little operation first, you know—" And he pretended to choke and rolled up his eyes.

Gervaise staggered to her feet. He, too, rejected her and would have nothing to do with her. She crawled into her room and threw herself on her straw. She was sorry she had eaten anything and delayed the work of starvation.

CHAPTER XIII

THE HOSPITAL

THE NEXT DAY Gervaise received ten francs from her son Etienne, who had steady work. He occasionally sent her a little money, knowing that there was none too much of that commodity in his poor mother's pocket.

She cooked her dinner and ate it alone, for Coupeau did not appear, nor did she hear a word of his whereabouts for nearly a week. Finally a printed paper was given her which frightened her at first, but she was soon relieved to find that it simply conveyed to her the information that her husband was at Sainte-Anne's again.

Gervaise was in no way disturbed. Coupeau knew the way back well enough;

he would return in due season. She soon heard that he and Mes-Bottes had spent the whole week in dissipation, and she even felt a little angry that they had not seen fit to offer her a glass of wine with all their feasting and carousing.

On Sunday, as Gervaise had a nice little repast ready for the evening, she decided that an excursion would give her an appetite. The letter from the asylum stared her in the face and worried her. The snow had melted; the sky was gray and soft, and the air was fresh. She started at noon, as the days were now short and Sainte-Anne's was a long distance off, but as there were a great many people in the street, she was amused.

When she reached the hospital she heard a strange story. It seems that Coupeau—how, no one could say—had escaped from the hospital and had been found under the bridge. He had thrown himself over the parapet, declaring that armed men were driving him with the point of their bayonets.

One of the nurses took Gervaise up the stairs. At the head she heard terrific howls which froze the marrow in her bones.

"It is he!" said the nurse.

"He? Whom do you mean?"

"I mean your husband. He has gone on like that ever since day before yesterday, and he dances all the time too. You will see!"

Ah, what a sight it was! The cell was cushioned from the floor to the ceiling, and on the floor were mattresses on which Coupeau danced and howled in his ragged blouse. The sight was terrific. He threw himself wildly against the window and then to the other side of the cell, shaking hands as if he wished to break them off and fling them in defiance at the whole world. These wild motions are sometimes imitated, but no one who has not seen the real and terrible sight can imagine its horror.

"What is it? What is it?" gasped Gervaise.

A house surgeon, a fair and rosy youth, was sitting, calmly taking notes. The case was a peculiar one and had excited a great deal of attention among the physicians attached to the hospital.

"You can stay awhile," he said, "but keep very quiet. He will not recognize you, however."

Coupeau, in fact, did not seem to notice his wife, who had not yet seen his face. She went nearer. Was that really he? She never would have known him with his bloodshot eyes and distorted features. His skin was so hot that the air was heated around him and was as if it were varnished—shining and damp with perspiration. He was dancing, it is true, but as if on burning plowshares; not a motion seemed to be voluntary.

Gervaise went to the young surgeon, who was beating a tune on the back of his chair.

"Will he get well, sir?" she said.

The surgeon shook his head.

"What is he saying? Hark! He is talking now."

"Just be quiet, will you?" said the young man. "I wish to listen."

Coupeau was speaking fast and looking all about, as if he were examining the underbrush in the Bois de Vincennes.

"Where is it now?" he exclaimed and then, straightening himself, he looked off into the distance.

"It is a fair," he exclaimed, "and lanterns in the trees, and the water is running everywhere: fountains, cascades and all sorts of things."

He drew a long breath, as if enjoying the delicious freshness of the air.

By degrees, however, his features contracted again with pain, and he ran quickly around the wall of his cell.

"More trickery," he howled. "I knew it!"

He started back with a hoarse cry; his teeth chattered with terror.

"No, I will not throw myself over! All that water would drown me! No, I will not!"

"I am going," said Gervaise to the surgeon. "I cannot stay another moment."

She was very pale. Coupeau kept up his infernal dance while she tottered down the stairs, followed by his hoarse voice.

How good it was to breathe the fresh air outside!

That evening everyone in the huge house in which Coupeau had lived talked of his strange disease. The concierge, crazy to hear the details, condescended to invite Gervaise to take a glass of cordial, forgetting that he had turned a cold shoulder upon her for many weeks.

Mme Lorilleux and Mme Poisson were both there also. Boche had heard of a cabinetmaker who had danced the polka until he died. He had drunk absinthe.

Gervaise finally, not being able to make them understand her description, asked for the table to be moved and there, in the center of the loge, imitated her husband, making frightful leaps and horrible contortions.

"Yes, that was what he did!"

And then everybody said it was not possible that man could keep up such violent exercise for even three hours.

Gervaise told them to go and see if they did not believe her. But Mme Lorilleux declared that nothing would induce her to set foot within Sainte-Anne's, and Virginie, whose face had grown longer and longer with each successive week that the shop got deeper into debt, contented herself with murmuring that life was not always gay—in fact, in her opinion, it was a pretty dismal thing. As the wine was finished, Gervaise bade them all good night. When she was not speaking she had sat with fixed, distended eyes. Coupeau was before them all the time.

The next day she said to herself when she rose that she would never go to the hospital again; she could do no good. But as midday arrived she could stay away no longer and started forth, without a thought of the length of the walk, so great were her mingled curiosity and anxiety.

She was not obliged to ask a question; she heard the frightful sounds at the very foot of the stairs. The keeper, who was carrying a cup of tisane across the corridor, stopped when he saw her.

"He keeps it up well!" he said.

She went in but stood at the door, as she saw there were people there. The young surgeon had surrendered his chair to an elderly gentleman wearing

several decorations. He was the chief physician of the hospital, and his eyes were like gimlets.

Gervaise tried to see Coupeau over the bald head of that gentleman. Her husband was leaping and dancing with undiminished strength. The perspiration poured more constantly from his brow now; that was all. His feet had worn holes in the mattress with his steady tramp from window to wall.

Gervaise asked herself why she had come back. She had been accused the evening before of exaggerating the picture, but she had not made it strong enough. The next time she imitated him she could do it better. She listened to what the physicians were saying: the house surgeon was giving the details of the night with many words which she did not understand, but she gathered that Coupeau had gone on in the same way all night. Finally he said this was the wife of the patient. Wherefore the surgeon in chief turned and interrogated her with the air of a police judge.

"Did this man's father drink?"

"A little, sir. Just as everybody does. He fell from a roof when he had been drinking and was killed."

"Did his mother drink?"

"Yes sir—that is, a little now and then. He had a brother who died in convulsions, but the others are very healthy."

The surgeon looked at her and said coldly:

"You drink too?"

Gervaise attempted to defend herself and deny the accusation.

"You drink," he repeated, "and see to what it leads. Someday you will be here, and like this."

She leaned against the wall, utterly overcome. The physician turned away. He knelt on the mattress and carefully watched Coupeau; he wished to see if his feet trembled as much as his hands. His extremities vibrated as if on wires. The disease was creeping on, and the peculiar shivering seemed to be under the skin—it would cease for a minute or two and then begin again. The belly and the shoulders trembled like water just on the point of boiling.

Coupeau seemed to suffer more than the evening before. His complaints were curious and contradictory. A million pins were pricking him. There was a weight under the skin; a cold, wet animal was crawling over him. Then there were other creatures on his shoulder.

"I am thirsty," he groaned; "so thirsty."

The house surgeon took a glass of lemonade from a tray and gave it to him. He seized the glass in both hands, drank one swallow, spilling the whole of it at the same time. He at once spat it out in disgust.

"It is brandy!" he exclaimed.

Then the surgeon, on a sign from his chief, gave him some water, and Coupeau did the same thing.

"It is brandy!" he cried. "Brandy! Oh, my God!"

For twenty-four hours he had declared that everything he touched to his lips was brandy, and with tears begged for something else, for it burned his throat, he said. Beef tea was brought to him; he refused it, saying it smelled

of alcohol. He seemed to suffer intense and constant agony from the poison which he vowed was in the air. He asked why people were allowed to rub matches all the time under his nose, to choke him with their vile fumes.

The physicians watched Coupeau with care and interest. The phantoms which had hitherto haunted him by night now appeared before him at mid-day. He saw spiders' webs hanging from the wall as large as the sails of a man-of-war. Then these webs changed to nets, whose meshes were constantly contracting only to enlarge again. These nets held black balls, and they, too, swelled and shrank. Suddenly he cried out:

"The rats! Oh, the rats!"

The balls had been transformed to rats. The vile beasts found their way through the meshes of the nets and swarmed over the mattress and then disappeared as suddenly as they came.

The rats were followed by a monkey, who went in and came out from the wall, each time so near his face that Coupeau started back in disgust. All this vanished in the twinkling of an eye. He apparently thought the walls were unsteady and about to fall, for he uttered shriek after shriek of agony.

"Fire! Fire!" he screamed. "They can't stand long. They are shaking! Fire! Fire! The whole heavens are bright with the light! Help! Help!"

His shrieks ended in a convulsed murmur. He foamed at the mouth. The surgeon in chief turned to the assistant.

"You keep the temperature at forty degrees?" he asked.

"Yes sir."

A dead silence ensued. Then the surgeon shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, continue the same treatment—beef tea, milk, lemonade and quinine as directed. Do not leave him, and send for me if there is any change."

And he left the room, Gervaise following close at his heels, seeking an opportunity of asking him if there was no hope. But he stalked down the corridor with so much dignity that she dared not approach him.

She stood for a moment, undecided whether she should go back to Coupeau or not, but hearing him begin again the lamentable cry for water:

"Water, not brandy!"

She hurried on, feeling that she could endure no more that day. In the streets the galloping horses made her start with a strange fear that all the inmates of Sainte-Anne's were at her heels. She remembered what the physician had said, with what terrors he had threatened her, and she wondered if she already had the disease.

When she reached the house the concierge and all the others were waiting and called her into the loge.

Was Coupeau still alive? they asked.

Boche seemed quite disturbed at her answer, as he had made a bet that he would not live twenty-four hours. Everyone was astonished. Mme Lorilleux made a mental calculation:

"Sixty hours," she said. "His strength is extraordinary."

Then Boche begged Gervaise to show them once more what Coupeau did.

The demand became general, and it was pointed out to her that she ought

not to refuse, for there were two neighbors there who had not seen her representation the night previous and who had come in expressly to witness it.

They made a space in the center of the room, and a shiver of expectation ran through the little crowd.

Gervaise was very reluctant. She was really afraid—afraid of making herself ill. She finally made the attempt but drew back again hastily.

No, she could not; it was quite impossible. Everyone was disappointed, and Virginie went away.

Then everyone began to talk of the Poissons. A warrant had been served on them the night before. Poisson was to lose his place. As to Lantier, he was hovering around a woman who thought of taking the shop and meant to sell hot tripe. Lantier was in luck, as usual.

As they talked someone caught sight of Gervaise and pointed her out to the others. She was at the very back of the loge, her feet and hands trembling, imitating Coupeau, in fact. They spoke to her. She stared wildly about, as if awaking from a dream, and then left the room.

The next day she left the house at noon, as she had done before. And as she entered Sainte-Anne's she heard the same terrific sounds.

When she reached the cell she found Coupeau raving mad! He was fighting in the middle of the cell with invisible enemies. He tried to hide himself; he talked and he answered, as if there were twenty persons. Gervaise watched him with distended eyes. He fancied himself on a roof, laying down the sheets of zinc. He blew the furnace with his mouth, and he went down on his knees and made a motion as if he had soldering irons in his hand. He was troubled by his shoes: it seemed as if he thought they were dangerous. On the next roofs stood persons who insulted him by letting quantities of rats loose. He stamped here and there in his desire to kill them and the spiders too! He pulled away his clothing to catch the creatures who, he said, intended to burrow under his skin. In another minute he believed himself to be a locomotive and puffed and panted. He darted toward the window and looked down into the street as if he were on a roof.

"Look!" he said. "There is a traveling circus. I see the lions and the panthers making faces at me. And there is Clémence. Good God, man, don't fire!"

And he gesticulated to the men who, he said, were pointing their guns at him.

He talked incessantly, his voice growing louder and louder, higher and higher.

"Ah, it is you, is it? But please keep your hair out of my mouth."

And he passed his hand over his face as if to take away the hair.

"Who is it?" said the keeper.

"My wife, of course."

He looked at the wall, turning his back to Gervaise, who felt very strange, and looked at the wall to see if she were there! He talked on.

"You look very fine. Where did you get that dress? Come here and let me arrange it for you a little. You devil! There he is again!"

And he leaped at the wall, but the soft cushions threw him back.

"Whom do you see?" asked the young doctor.

"Lantier! Lantier!"

Gervaise could not endure the eyes of the young man, for the scene brought back to her so much of her former life.

Coupeau fancied, as he had been thrown back from the wall in front, that he was now attacked in the rear, and he leaped over the mattress with the agility of a cat. His respiration grew shorter and shorter, his eyes starting from their sockets.

"He is killing her!" he shrieked. "Killing her! Just see the blood!"

He fell back against the wall with his hands wide open before him, as if he were repelling the approach of some frightful object. He uttered two long, low groans and then fell flat on the mattress.

"He is dead! He is dead!" moaned Gervaise.

The keeper lifted Coupeau. No, he was not dead; his bare feet quivered with a regular motion. The surgeon in chief came in, bringing two colleagues. The three men stood in grave silence, watching the man for some time. They uncovered him, and Gervaise saw his shoulders and back.

The tremulous motion had now taken complete possession of the body as well as the limbs, and a strange ripple ran just under the skin.

"He is asleep," said the surgeon in chief, turning to his colleagues.

Coupeau's eyes were closed, and his face twitched convulsively. Coupeau might sleep, but his feet did nothing of the kind.

Gervaise, seeing the doctors lay their hands on Coupeau's body, wished to do the same. She approached softly and placed her hand on his shoulder and left it there for a minute.

What was going on there? A river seemed hurrying on under that skin. It was the liquor of the Assommoir, working like a mole through muscle, nerves, bone and marrow.

The doctors went away, and Gervaise, at the end of another hour, said to the young surgeon:

"He is dead, sir."

But the surgeon, looking at the feet, said: "No," for those poor feet were still dancing.

Another hour, and yet another passed. Suddenly the feet were stiff and motionless, and the young surgeon turned to Gervaise.

"He is dead," he said.

Death alone had stopped those feet.

When Gervaise went back she was met at the door by a crowd of people who wished to ask her questions, she thought.

"He is dead," she said quietly as she moved on.

But no one heard her. They had their own tale to tell then. How Poisson had nearly murdered Lantier. Poisson was a tiger, and he ought to have seen what was going on long before. And Boche said the woman had taken the shop and that Lantier was, as usual, in luck again, for he adored tripe.

In the meantime Gervaise went directly to Mme Lerat and Mme Lorilleux and said faintly:

"He is dead—after four days of horror."

Then the two sisters were in duty bound to pull out their handkerchiefs. Their brother had lived a most dissolute life, but then he was their brother.

Boche shrugged his shoulders and said in an audible voice:

"Pshaw! It is only one drunkard the less!"

After this day Gervaise was not always quite right in her mind, and it was one of the attractions of the house to see her act Coupeau.

But her representations were often involuntary. She trembled at times from head to foot and uttered little spasmodic cries. She had taken the disease in a modified form at Sainte-Anne's from looking so long at her husband. But she never became altogether like him in the few remaining months of her existence.

She sank lower day by day. As soon as she got a little money from any source whatever she drank it away at once. Her landlord decided to turn her out of the room she occupied, and as Father Bru was discovered dead one day in his den under the stairs, M. Marescot allowed her to take possession of his quarters. It was there, therefore, on the old straw bed, that she lay waiting for death to come. Apparently even Mother Earth would have none of her. She tried several times to throw herself out of the window, but death took her by bits, as it were. In fact, no one knew exactly when she died or exactly what she died of. They spoke of cold and hunger.

But the truth was she died of utter weariness of life, and Father Bazonge came the day she was found dead in her den.

Under his arm he carried a coffin, and he was very tipsy and as gay as a lark.

"It is foolish to be in a hurry, because one always gets what one wants finally. I am ready to give you all your good pleasure when your time comes. Some want to go, and some want to stay. And here is one who wanted to go and was kept waiting."

And when he lifted Gervaise in his great, coarse hands he did it tenderly. And as he laid her gently in her coffin he murmured between two hiccups:

"It is I—my dear, it is I," said this rough consoler of women. "It is I. Be happy now and sleep quietly, my dear!"

GERMINAL

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PART ONE

CHAPTER I

OVER THE OPEN PLAIN, beneath a starless sky as dark and thick as ink, a man walked alone along the highway from Marchiennes to Montsou, a straight paved road ten kilometers in length, intersecting the beetroot fields. He could not even see the black soil before him and only felt the immense flat horizon by the gusts of March wind, squalls as strong as on the sea, and frozen from sweeping leagues of marsh and naked earth. No tree could be seen against the sky, and the road unrolled as straight as a pier in the midst of the blinding spray of darkness.

The man had set out from Marchiennes about two o'clock. He walked with long strides, shivering beneath his worn cotton jacket and corduroy breeches. A small parcel tied in a check handkerchief troubled him much, and he pressed it against his side, sometimes with one elbow, sometimes with the other, so that he could slip to the bottom of his pockets both the benumbed hands that bled beneath the lashes of the wind. A single idea occupied his head—the empty head of a workman without work and without lodging—the hope that the cold would be less keen after sunrise. For an hour he went on thus, when on the left, two kilometers from Montsou, he saw red flames, three stoves burning in the open air and apparently suspended. At first he hesitated, half afraid. Then he could not resist the painful need to warm his hands for a moment.

The steep road led downward, and everything disappeared. The man saw on his right a paling, a wall of coarse planks shutting in a line of rails, while a grassy slope rose on the left, surmounted by confused gables, a vision of a village with low, uniform roofs. He went on some two hundred paces. Suddenly at a bend in the road the fires reappeared close to him, though he could not understand how they burned so high in the dead sky, like smoky moons. But on the level soil another sight had struck him. It was a heavy mass, a low pile of buildings from which rose the silhouette of a factory chimney; occasional gleams appeared from dirty windows; five or six melancholy lanterns were hung outside to frames of blackened wood, which vaguely outlined the profiles of gigantic stages, and from this fantastic apparition, drowned in night and smoke, a single voice arose, the thick, long breathing of a steam escapement that could not be seen.

Then the man recognized a pit. His despair returned. What was the good? There would be no work. Instead of turning toward the buildings he decided at last to ascend the pit bank on which burned in iron baskets the three coal fires which gave light and warmth for work. The laborers in the cutting must have been working late; they were still throwing out the useless rubbish. Now he heard the landers push the wagons on the stages. He could distinguish living shadows tipping over the trams or tubs near each fire.

"Good day," he said, approaching one of the baskets.

Turning his back to the stove, the carman stood upright. He was an old man, dressed in knitted violet wool with a rabbit-skin cap on his head, while his horse, a great yellow horse, waited with the immobility of stone while they emptied the six trams he drew. The workman employed at the tipping cradle, a red-haired, lean fellow, did not hurry himself; he pressed on the lever with a sleepy hand. And above, the wind grew stronger—an icy north wind—and its great, regular breaths passed by like the strokes of a scythe.

"Good day," replied the old man. There was silence. The man, who felt that he was being looked at suspiciously, at once told his name.

"I am called Etienne Lantier. I am an engineman. Any work here?"

The flames lit him up. He might be about twenty-one years of age, a very brown, handsome man, who looked strong in spite of his thin limbs.

The carman, thus reassured, shook his head.

"Work for an engineman? No, no! There were two came yesterday. There's nothing."

A gust cut short their speech. Then Etienne asked, pointing to the somber pile of buildings at the foot of the platform:

"A pit, isn't it?"

The old man this time could not reply: he was strangled by a violent cough. At last he expectorated, and his expectoration left a black patch on the purple soil.

"Yes, a pit. The Voreux. There! The settlement is quite near."

In his turn and with extended arm he pointed out in the night the village of which the young man had vaguely seen the roofs. But the six trams were empty, and he followed them without cracking his whip, his legs stiffened by rheumatism, while the great yellow horse went on of itself, pulling heavily between the rails beneath a new gust which bristled its coat.

The Voreux was now emerging from the gloom. Etienne, who forgot himself before the stove, warming his poor bleeding hands, looked round and could see each part of the pit: the shed tarred with siftings, the pit frame, the vast chamber of the winding machine, the square turret of the exhaustion pump. This pit, piled up in the bottom of a hollow, with its squat brick buildings, raising its chimney like a threatening horn, seemed to him to have the evil air of a gluttonous beast crouching there to devour the earth. While examining it he thought of himself, of his vagabond existence these eight days he had been seeking work. He saw himself again at his workshop at the railway, delivering a blow at his foreman, driven from Lille, driven from everywhere. On Saturday he had arrived at Marchiennes, where they said that work was to be had at the forges, and there was nothing, neither at the forges nor at Sonnevill's. He had been obliged to pass the Sunday hidden beneath the wood of a cartwright's yard, from which the watchman had just turned him out at two o'clock in the morning. He had nothing, not a penny, not even a crust; what should he do, wandering along the roads without aim, not knowing where to shelter himself from the wind? Yes, it was certainly a pit; the occasional lanterns lit up the square; a door, suddenly opened, had enabled him to catch sight of the furnaces

in a clear light. He could explain even the escapement of the pump, that thick, long breathing that went on without ceasing and which seemed to be the monster's congested respiration.

The workman, expanding his back at the tipping cradle, had not even lifted his eyes on Etienne, and the latter was about to pick up his little bundle, which had fallen to the earth, when a spasm of coughing announced the carman's return. Slowly he emerged from the darkness, followed by the yellow horse drawing six more laden trams.

"Are there factories at Montsou?" asked the young man.

The old man expectorated, then replied in the wind:

"Oh, it isn't factories that are lacking. Should have seen it three or four years ago. Everything was roaring then. There were not men enough! There never were such wages. And now they are tightening their bellies again. Nothing but misery in the country; everyone is being sent away; workshops closing one after the other. It is not the emperor's fault, perhaps, but why should he go and fight in America without counting that the beasts are dying from cholera, like the people?"

Then in short phrases and with broken breath the two continued to complain. Etienne narrated his vain wanderings of the past week; must one, then, die of hunger? Soon the roads will be full of beggars.

"Yes," said the old man, "this will turn out badly, for God does not allow so many Christians to be thrown on the street."

"We haven't got meat every day."

"But if one had bread!"

"True, if one only had bread."

Their voices were lost, gusts of wind carrying away the words in a melancholy howl.

"Here!" began the carman again very loudly, turning toward the south. "Montsou is over there."

And stretching out his hand again, he pointed out invisible spots in the darkness as he named them. Below, at Montsou, the Fauvelle sugarworks were still going, but the Hoton sugarworks had just been dismissing hands; there were only the Dutilleul flour mill and the Bleuze ropewalk for mine cables which kept up. Then with a large gesture he indicated the north half of the horizon: the Sonnevillie workshops had not received two thirds of their usual orders; only two of the three blast furnaces of the Marchiennes forges were alight; finally, at the Gagebois glassworks a strike was threatening, for there was talk of a reduction of wages.

"I know, I know," replied the young man at each indication. "I have been there."

"With us here things are going on at present," added the carman, "but the pits have lowered their output. And see opposite, at the Victoire, there are also only two batteries of coke furnaces alight."

He expectorated and set out behind his sleepy horse after harnessing it to the empty trams.

Now Etienne could oversee the entire country. The darkness remained pro-

found, but the old man's hand had, as it were, filled it with great miseries, which the young man unconsciously felt at this moment around him everywhere in the limitless tract. Was it not a cry of famine that the March wind rolled up across this naked plain? The squalls were furious: they seemed to bring the death of labor, a famine which would kill many men. And he tried to pierce the shades, tormented at once by the desire and by the fear of seeing. Everything was hidden in the unknown depths of the gloomy night. He only perceived, very far off, the blast furnaces and the coke ovens. The latter, with their hundreds of chimneys planted obliquely, made lines of red flame, while the two towers, more to the left, burned blue against the blank sky, like giant torches. It resembled a melancholy conflagration. No other stars rose on the threatening horizon except these nocturnal fires in a land of coal and iron.

"You belong to Belgium, perhaps?" began again the carman, who had returned behind Etienne.

This time he only brought three trams. Those at least could be tipped over; an accident which had happened to the cage, a broken screw nut, would stop work for a good quarter of an hour. At the bottom of the pit bank there was silence; the landers no longer shook the stages with a prolonged vibration. One only heard from the pit the distant sound of a hammer tapping on an iron plate.

"No, I come from the south," replied the young man.

The workman, after having emptied the trams, had seated himself on the earth, glad of the accident, maintaining his savage silence; he had simply lifted his large, dim eyes to the carman, as if annoyed by so many words. The latter, indeed, did not usually talk at such length. The unknown man's face must have pleased him that he should have been taken by one of these ichtings for confidence which sometimes make old people talk aloud even when alone.

"I belong to Montsou," he said. "I am called Bonnemort."

"Is it a nickname?" asked Etienne, astonished.

The old man made a grimace of satisfaction and pointed to the Voreux.

"Yes, yes; they have pulled me three times out of that, torn to pieces, once with all my hair scorched, once with my gizzard full of earth and another time with my belly swollen with water, like a frog. And then when they saw that nothing would kill me they called me Bonnemort for a joke."

His cheerfulness increased, like the creaking of an ill-greased pulley, and ended by degenerating into a terrible spasm of coughing. The fire basket now clearly lit up his large head with its scanty white hair and flat, livid face, spotted with bluish patches. He was short, with an enormous neck, projecting calves and heels and long arms, with massive hands falling to his knees. For the rest, like his horse, which stood immovable without suffering from the wind, he seemed to be made of stone; he had no appearance of feeling either the cold or the gusts that whistled at his ears. When he coughed his throat was torn by a deep rasping; he spat at the foot of the basket, and the earth was blackened.

Etienne looked at him and at the ground which he had thus stained.

"Have you been working long at the mine?"

Bonnemort flung open both arms.

"Long? I should think so. I was not eight when I went down into the

Voreux, and I am now fifty-eight. Reckon that up! I have been everything down there; at first trammer, then putter, when I had the strength to wheel, then pikeman for eighteen years. Then because of my cursed legs they put me into the earth cutting, to bank up and patch, until they had to bring me up, because the doctor said I should stay there for good. Then after five years of that they made me carman. Eh? That's fine—fifty years at the mine, forty-five down below."

While he was speaking fragments of burning coal, which now and then fell from the basket, lit up his pale face with their red reflection.

"They tell me to rest," he went on, "but I'm not going to; I'm not such a fool. I can get on for two years longer, to my sixtieth, so as to get the pension of one hundred and eighty francs. If I wish them good evening today they would give me a hundred and fifty at once. They are cunning, the beggars. Besides, I am sound, except my legs. You see, it's the water which has got under my skin through being always wet in the cuttings. There are days when I can't move a paw without screaming."

A spasm of coughing interrupted him again.

"And that makes you cough so," said Etienne.

But he vigorously shook his head. Then when he could speak:

"No, no! I caught cold a month ago. I never used to cough; now I can't get rid of it. And the queer thing is that I spit, that I spit—"

The rasping was again heard in his throat, followed by the black expectoration.

"Is it blood?" asked Etienne, at last venturing to question him.

Bonnemort slowly wiped his mouth with the back of his hand.

"It's coal. I've got enough in my carcass to warm me till I die. And it's five years since I put a foot down below. I stored it up, it seems, without knowing it; it keeps you alive!"

There was silence. The distant hammer struck regular blows in the pit, and the wind passed by with its moan, like a cry of hunger and weariness coming out of the depths of the night. Before the flames, which grew low, the old man went on in lower tones, chewing over again his old recollections. Ah, certainly: it was not yesterday that he and his began hammering at the seam. The family had worked for the Montsou Mining Company since it started, and that was long ago, a hundred and six years already. His grandfather Guillaume Maheu, an urchin of fifteen then, had found the rich coal at Réquillart, the company's first pit, an old abandoned pit today down below near the Fauvelle sugarworks. All the country knew it, and as a proof the discovered seam was called the Guillaume, after his grandfather. He had not known him—a big fellow, it was said, very strong, who died of old age at sixty. Then his father Nicolas Maheu, called Le Rouge, when hardly forty years of age had died in the pit, which was being excavated at that time: a landslip, a complete slide, and the rock drank his blood and swallowed his bones. Two of his uncles and his three brothers later on also left their skins there. He, Vincent Maheu, who had come out almost whole, except that his legs were rather shaky, was looked upon as a knowing fellow. But what could one do? One must work; one worked here

from father to son, as one would work at anything else. His son Toussaint Maheu was being worked to death there now, and his grandsons and all his people, who lived opposite in the settlement. A hundred and six years of mining, the youngsters after the old ones, for the same master. Eh? There were many bourgeois that could not give their history so well!

"Anyhow, when one has got enough to eat!" murmured Etienne again.

"That is what I say. As long as one has bread to eat one can live."

Bonnemort was silent, and his eyes turned toward the settlement, where lights were appearing one by one. Four o'clock struck in the Montsou tower, and the cold became keener.

"And is your company rich?" asked Etienne.

The old man shrugged his shoulders and then let them fall as if overwhelmed beneath an avalanche of gold.

"Ah yes! Ah yes! Not perhaps so rich as its neighbor, the Anzin Company. But millions and millions all the same. They can't count it. Nineteen pits, thirteen at work, the Voreux, the Victoire, Crèveœur, Mirou, St Thomas, Madeleine, Feutry-Cantel, and still more, and six for pumping or ventilation, like Réquillart. Ten thousand workers, concessions reaching over sixty-seven communes, an output of five thousand tons a day, a railway joining all the pits and workshops and factories! Ah yes! Ah yes! There's money there!"

The rolling of trams on the stages made the big yellow horse prick his ears. The cage was evidently repaired below, and the landers had got to work again. While he was harnessing his beast to redescend, the carman added gently, addressing himself to the horse:

"Won't do to chatter, lazy good-for-nothing! If Monsieur Hennebeau knew how you waste your time!"

Etienne looked thoughtfully into the night. He asked:

"Then Monsieur Hennebeau owns the mine?"

"No," explained the old man, "Monsieur Hennebeau is only the general manager; he is paid just the same as us."

With a gesture the young man pointed into the darkness.

"Who does it all belong to then?"

But Bonnemort was for a moment so suffocated by a new and violent spasm that he could not get his breath. Then when he had expectorated and wiped the black froth from his lips he replied in the rising wind:

"Eh? All that belong to? Nobody knows. To people."

And with his hand he pointed in the darkness to a vague spot, an unknown and remote place, inhabited by those people for whom the Maheus had been hammering at the seam for more than a century. His voice assumed a tone of religious awe; it was as if he were speaking of an inaccessible tabernacle containing a sated and crouching god to whom they had given all their flesh and whom they had never seen.

"At all events, if one can get enough bread to eat!" repeated Etienne for the third time without any apparent transition.

"Indeed, yes; if we could always get bread it would be too good."

The horse had started; the carman, in his turn, disappeared with the trailing

step of an invalid. Near the tipping cradle the workman had not stirred, gathered up in a ball, burying his chin between his knees, with his great dim eyes fixed on emptiness.

When he had picked up his bundle Etienne still remained at the same spot. He felt the gusts freezing his back, while his chest was burning before the large fire. Perhaps, all the same, it would be as well to inquire at the pit; the old man might not know. Then he resigned himself; he would accept any work. Where should he go, and what was to become of him in this country famished for lack of work? Must he leave his carcass behind a wall, like a strayed dog? But one doubt troubled him, a fear of the Voreux in the middle of this flat plain, drowned in so thick a night. At every gust the wind seemed to rise as if it blew from an ever-broadening horizon. No dawn whitened the dead sky. The blast furnaces alone flamed, and the coke ovens, making the darkness redder without illuminating the unknown. And the Voreaux, at the bottom of its hole, with its posture as of an evil beast, continued to crunch, breathing with a heavier and slower respiration, troubled by its painful digestion of human flesh.

CHAPTER II

IN THE MIDDLE of the fields of wheat and beetroot the Deux-Cent-Quarante settlement slept beneath the black night. One could vaguely distinguish four immense blocks of small houses, back to back, barracks or hospital blocks, geometric and parallel, separated by three large avenues which were divided into gardens of equal size. And over the desert plain one heard only the moan of squalls through the broken trellises of the enclosures.

In the Maheus' house, number sixteen in the second block, nothing was stirring. The single room that occupied the first floor was drowned in a thick darkness which seemed to overwhelm with its weight the sleep of the beings whom one felt to be there in a mass, with open mouths, overcome by weariness. In spite of the keen cold outside, there was a living heat in the heavy air, that hot stuffiness of even the best-kept bedrooms, the smell of human cattle.

Four o'clock had struck from the clock in the room on the ground floor, but nothing yet stirred; one heard the piping of slender respirations, accompanied by two series of sonorous snores. And suddenly Catherine got up. In her weariness she had, as usual, counted the four strokes through the floor without the strength to arouse herself completely. Then throwing her legs from under the bedclothes, she felt about, at last struck a match and lit the candle. But she remained seated, her head so heavy that it fell back between her shoulders, seeking to return to the bolster.

Now the candle lit up the room, a square room with two windows and filled with three beds. There could be seen a cupboard, a table and two old walnut chairs, whose smoky tone made hard, dark patches against the walls, which were painted a light yellow. And nothing else, only clothes hung to nails, a jug placed on the floor and a red pan which served as a basin. In the bed on the left Zacharie, the eldest, a youth of one and twenty, was asleep with his brother

Jeanlin, who had completed his eleventh year; in the right-hand bed two urchins, Lénore and Henri, the first six years old, the second four, slept in each other's arms, while Catherine shared the third bed with her sister Alzire, so small for her nine years that Catherine would not have felt her near her if it were not for the little invalid's humpback, which pressed into her side. The glass door was open; one could perceive the lobby of a landing, a sort of recess in which the father and the mother occupied a fourth bed, against which they had been obliged to install the cradle of the latest-comer, Estelle, aged scarcely three months.

However, Catherine made a desperate effort. She stretched herself; she fidgeted her two hands in the red hair which covered her forehead and neck. Slender for her fifteen years, all that showed of her limbs outside the narrow sheath of her chemise were her bluish feet, as it were, tattooed with coal, and her slight arms, the milky whiteness of which contrasted with the sallow tint of her face, already spoiled by constant washing with black soap. A final yawn opened her rather large mouth with splendid teeth against the chlorotic pallor of her gums, while her gray eyes were crying in her fight with sleep with a look of painful distress and weariness which seemed to spread over the whole of her naked body.

But a growl came from the landing, and Maheu's thick voice stammered:

"Devil take it! It's time. Is it you lighting up, Catherine?"

"Yes, Father; it has just struck downstairs."

"Quick then, lazy. If you had danced less on Sunday you would have waked us earlier. A fine lazy life!"

And he went on grumbling, but sleep returned to him also. His reproaches became confused and were extinguished in fresh snoring.

The young girl, in her chemise, with her naked feet on the floor, moved about in the room. As she passed by the bed of Henri and Lénore she replaced the coverlet which had slipped down. They did not wake, lost in the strong sleep of childhood. Alzire, with open eyes, had turned to take the warm place of her big sister without speaking.

"I say now, Zacharie--and you, Jeanlin; I say now!" repeated Catherine, standing before her two brothers, who were still wallowing with their noses in the bolster.

She had to seize the elder by the shoulder and shake him; then while he was muttering abuse it came into her head to uncover them by snatching away the sheet. That seemed funny to her, and she began to laugh when she saw the two boys struggling with naked legs.

"Stupid, leave me alone," growled Zacharie in ill temper, sitting up. "I don't like tricks. Good lord! Say it's time to get up?"

He was lean and ill made, with a long face and a chin which showed signs of a sprouting beard, yellow hair and the anemic pallor which belonged to his whole family.

His shirt had rolled up to his belly, and he lowered it, not from modesty but because he was not warm.

"It has struck downstairs," repeated Catherine. "Come! Up! Father's angry."

Jeanlin, who had rolled himself up, closed his eyes, saying: "Go and hang yourself; I'm going to sleep."

She laughed again, the laugh of a good-natured girl. He was so small, his limbs so thin, with enormous joints, enlarged by scrofula, that she took him up in her arms. But he kicked about; his apish face, pale and wrinkled, with its green eyes and great ears, grew pale with the rage of weakness. He said nothing; he bit her right breast.

"Beastly fellow!" she murmured, keeping back a cry and putting him on the floor.

Alzire was silent, with the sheet tucked under her chin, but she had not gone to sleep. With her intelligent invalid's eyes she followed her sister and her two brothers, who were now dressing. Another quarrel broke out around the pan; the boys hustled the young girl because she was so long washing herself. Shirts flew about, and while still half asleep they eased themselves without shame, with the tranquil satisfaction of a litter of puppies that have grown up together. Catherine was ready first. She put on her miner's breeches, then her canvas jacket, and fastened the blue cap on her knotted hair; in these clean Monday clothes she had the appearance of a little man; nothing remained to indicate her sex except the slight roll of her hips.

"When the old man comes back," said Zacharie mischievously, "he'll like to find the bed unmade. You know I shall tell him it's you."

The old man was the grandfather, Bonnemort, who, as he worked during the night, slept by day, so that the bed was never cold; there was always someone snoring there. Without replying Catherine set herself to arrange the bed-clothes and tuck them in. But during the last moments sounds had been heard behind the wall in the next house. These brick buildings, economically put up by the company, were so thin that the least breath could be heard through them. The inmates lived there, elbow to elbow, from one end to the other, and no fact of family life remained hidden, even from the youngsters. A heavy step had tramped up the staircase; then there was a kind of soft fall, followed by a sigh of satisfaction.

"Good!" said Catherine. "Levaque has gone down, and here is Bouteloup come to join the Levaque woman."

Jeanlin grinned; even Alzire's eyes shone. Every morning they made fun of the household of three next door, a pikeman who lodged a worker in the cutting, an arrangement which gave the woman two men, one by night, the other by day.

"Philomène is coughing," began Catherine again after listening.

She was speaking of the eldest Levaque, a big girl of nineteen and the mistress of Zacharie, by whom she had already had two children; her chest was so delicate that she was only a sifter at the pit, never having been able to work below.

"Pooh! Philomène!" replied Zacharie. "She cares a lot; she's asleep. It's hog-sigh to sleep till six."

He was putting on his breeches when an idea occurred to him, and he opened the window. Outside in the darkness the settlement was awaking; lights were dawning one by one between the laths of the shutters. And there was another

dispute: he leaned out to watch if he could not see coming out of Pierron's, opposite, the captain of the Voreux, who was accused of sleeping with the Pierron woman, while his sister called to him that since the day before the husband had taken day duty at the pit eye and that certainly Dansaert could not sleep there that night. While the air entered in icy whiffs both of them, becoming angry, maintained the truth of their own information until cries and tears broke out. It was Estelle in her cradle, vexed by the cold.

Maheu woke up suddenly. What had he got in his bones then? Here he was going to sleep again like a good-for-nothing. And he swore so vigorously that the children became still. Zacharie and Jeanlin finished washing with slow weariness. Alzire, with her large, open eyes, continually stared. The two youngsters, Lénore and Henri, in each other's arms, had not stirred, breathing in the same quiet way in spite of the noise.

"Catherine, give me the candle," called out Maheu.

She finished buttoning her jacket and carried the candle into the closet, leaving her brothers to look for their clothes by what light came through the door. Her father jumped out of bed. She did not stop but went downstairs in her coarse woolen stockings, feeling her way, and lit another candle in the parlor to prepare the coffee. All the sabots of the family were beneath the sideboard.

"Will you be still, vermin?" began Maheu again, exasperated by Estelle's cries, which still went on.

He was short, like old Bonnemort, and resembled him, with his strong head, his flat, livid face beneath yellow hair cut very short. The child screamed more than ever, frightened by those great knotted arms which were held above her.

"Leave her alone; you know that she won't be still," said his wife, stretching herself in the middle of the bed.

She also had just awakened and was complaining how disgusting it was never to be able to finish the night. Could they not go away quietly? Buried in the clothes, she only showed her long face with large features of a heavy beauty, already disfigured at thirty-nine by her life of wretchedness and the seven children she had borne. With her eyes on the ceiling she spoke slowly while her man dressed himself. They both ceased to hear the little one, who was strangling herself with screaming.

"Eh? You know I haven't a penny and this is only Monday; still six days before the fortnight's out. This can't go on. You, all of you, only bring in nine francs. How do you expect me to go on? We are ten in the house."

"Oh, nine francs!" exclaimed Maheu. "I and Zacharie three: that makes six; Catherine and the father, two: that makes four; four and six, ten, and Jeanlin one: that makes eleven."

"Yes, eleven, but there are Sundays and the off days. Never more than nine, you know."

He did not reply, being occupied in looking on the ground for his leather belt. Then he said on getting up:

"Mustn't complain. I am sound, all the same. There's more than one at forty-two who are put to the patching."

"Maybe, my old man, but that does not give us bread. Where am I to get it from, eh? Have you got nothing?"

"I've got two coppers."

"Keep them for a half pint. Good lord, where am I to get it from? Six days! It will never end. We owe sixty francs to Maigrat, who turned me out of doors day before yesterday. That won't prevent me from going to see him again. But if he goes on refusing—"

And Maheude continued in her melancholy voice without moving her head, only closing her eyes now and then beneath the dim light of the candle. She said the cupboard was empty, the little ones asking for bread and butter; even the coffee was done, and the water caused colic, and the long days passed in deceiving hunger with boiled cabbage leaves. Little by little she had been obliged to raise her voice, for Estelle's screams drowned her words. These cries became unbearable. Maheu seemed all at once to hear them and, in a fury, snatched the little one up from the cradle and threw it on the mother's bed, stammering with rage:

"Here, take her; I'll do for her! Damn the child! It wants for nothing: it sucks and it complains louder than all the rest!"

Estelle began, in fact, to suck. Hidden beneath the clothes and soothed by the warmth of the bed, her cries subsided into the greedy little sound of her lips.

"Haven't the Piolaine people told you to go and see them?" asked the father after a period of silence.

The mother bit her lip with an air of discouraged doubt.

"Yes, they met me; they were carrying clothes for poor children. Yes, I'll take Lénore and Henri to them this morning. If they only gave me a few pence!"

There was silence again.

Maheu was ready. He remained a moment motionless, then added in his hollow voice:

"What is it that you want? Let things be, and see about the soup. It's no good talking, better be at work down below."

"True enough," replied Maheude. "Blow out the candle: I don't need to see the color of my thoughts."

He blew out the candle. Zacharie and Jeanlin were already going down; he followed them, and the wooden staircase creaked beneath their heavy feet clad in wool. Behind them the closet and the room were again dark. The children slept; even Alzire's eyelids were closed, but the mother now remained with her eyes open in the darkness, while pulling at her breast, the pendant breast of an exhausted woman, Estelle was purring like a kitten.

Down below Catherine had at first occupied herself with the fire, which was burning in the iron grate, flanked by two ovens. The company distributed every month to each family eight hectoliters of a hard, slaty coal gathered in the passages. It burned slowly, and the young girl, who piled up the fire every night, only had to stir it in the morning, adding a few fragments of soft coal carefully picked out. Then after having placed a kettle on the grate, she sat down before the sideboard.

It was a fairly large room, occupying all the ground floor, painted an apple

green and of Flemish cleanliness, with its flags well washed and covered with white sand. Besides the sideboard of varnished deal, the furniture consisted of a table and chairs of the same wood. Stuck onto the walls were some violently colored prints, portraits of the emperor and the empress, given by the company, of soldiers and of saints speckled with gold, contrasting crudely with the simple nudity of the room; and there was no other ornament except a box of rose-colored pasteboard on the sideboard and the clock with its daubed face and loud tick-tack, which seemed to fill the emptiness of the place. Near the staircase door another door led to the cellar. In spite of the cleanliness an odor of cooked onion, shut up since the night before, poisoned the hot, heavy air, always laden with an acrid flavor of coal.

Catherine, in front of the sideboard, was reflecting. There only remained the end of a loaf, cheese in fair abundance and a fragment of butter, and she had to provide bread and butter for four. At last she decided, cut the slices, took one and covered it with cheese, spread another with butter and stuck them together; that was the "brick," the bread-and-butter sandwich taken to the pit every morning. The four bricks were soon on the table in a row, cut with severe justice, from the big one for the father down to the little one for Jeanlin.

Catherine, who appeared absorbed in her household duties, must, however, have been thinking of the stories told by Zacharie about the head captain and the Pierron woman, for she half opened the front door and glanced outside. The wind was still whistling. There were numerous spots of light on the low fronts of the settlement, from which arose a vague tremor of awakening. Already doors were being closed, and black files of workers passed into the night. It was stupid of her to get cold, since the porter at the pit eye was certainly asleep, waiting to take his duties at six. Yet she remained and looked at the house on the other side of the gardens. The door opened, and her curiosity was aroused. But it could only be one of the little Pierrons, Lydie, setting out for the pit.

The hissing sound of steam made her turn. She shut the door and hastened back; the water was boiling over and putting out the fire. There was no more coffee. She had to be content to add the water to last night's dregs; then she sugared the coffeepot with brown sugar. At that moment her father and two brothers came downstairs.

"Faith!" exclaimed Zacharie when he had put his nose into his bowl. "Here's something that won't get into our heads."

Maheu shrugged his shoulders with an air of resignation.

"Bah! It's hot! It's good all the same."

Jeanlin had gathered up the fragments of bread and made soup of them. After having drunk, Catherine finished by emptying the coffeepot into the tin jacks. All four, standing up in the smoky light of the candle, swallowed their meal hastily.

"Are we at the end?" said the father. "One would say we were people of property."

But a voice came from the staircase, of which they had left the door open. It was Maheude, who called out:

"Take all the bread: I have some vermicelli for the children."

"Yes, yes," replied Catherine.

She had piled up the fire, wedging the pot that held the remains of the soup into a corner of the grate, so that the grandfather might find it when he came in at six. Each took his sabots from under the sideboard, passed the strings of his tin over his shoulder and placed his brick at his back, between shirt and jacket. And they went out, the men first, the girl, who came last, blowing out the candle and turning the key. The house became dark again.

"Ah, we're off together," said a man who was closing the door of the next house.

It was Levaque with his son Bébert, an urchin of twelve, a great friend of Jeanlin's. Catherine, in surprise, stifled a laugh in Zacharie's ear:

"Why, Bouteloup didn't even wait until the husband had gone!"

Now the lights in the settlement were extinguished, and the last door banged. All again fell asleep; the women and the little ones resuming their slumber in the midst of wider beds. And from the extinguished village to the roaring Voreux a slow filing of shadows took place beneath the squalls, the departure of the colliers to their work, bending their shoulders and trying to protect their arms, while the brick behind formed a hump on each back. Clothed in their thin jackets, they shivered with cold but without hastening, straggling along the road with the tramp of a flock.

CHAPTER III

ETIENNE had at last descended from the platform and entered the Voreux; he spoke to men whom he met, asking if there was work to be had, but all shook their heads, telling him to wait for the captain. They left him free to roam through the ill-lit buildings full of black holes, confusing with their complicated stories and rooms. After having mounted a dark and half-destroyed staircase, he found himself on a shaky footbridge; then he crossed the screening shed, which was plunged in such profound darkness that he walked with his hands before him for protection. Suddenly two enormous yellow eyes pierced the darkness in front of him. He was beneath the pit frame in the receiving room, at the very mouth of the shaft.

A captain, Father Richomme, a big man with the face of a good-natured gendarme and with a straight gray mustache, was at that moment going toward the receiver's office.

"Do they want a hand here for any kind of work?" asked Etienne again.

Richomme was about to say no, but he changed his mind and replied like the others as he went away:

"Wait for Monsieur Dansaert, the head captain."

Four lanterns were placed there, and the reflectors which threw all the light onto the shaft vividly illuminated the iron rail, the levels of the signals and bars, the joists of the guides along which slid the two cages. The rest of the vast room, like the nave of a church, was obscure and peopled by great floating

shadows. Only the lamp cabin shone at the far end, while in the receiver's office a small lamp looked like a fading star. Work was about to be resumed, and on the iron pavement there was a continual thunder, trams of coal being wheeled without ceasing, while the landers, with their long, bent backs, could be distinguished amid the movement of all these black and noisy things in perpetual agitation.

For a moment Etienne stood motionless, deafened and blinded. He felt frozen by the currents of air which entered from every side. Then he moved on a few paces, attracted by the winding engine, of which he could now see the glistening steel and copper. It was twenty-five meters beyond the shaft, in a loftier chamber, and placed so solidly on its brick foundation that though it worked at full speed, with all its four hundred horsepower, the movement of its enormous crank, emerging and plunging with oily softness, imparted no quiver to the walls. The engineman, standing at his post, listened to the ringing of the signals, and his eye never moved from the indicator where the shaft was figured, with its different levels, by a vertical groove traversed by shot hanging to strings, which represented the cages; and at each departure, when the machine was put in motion, the drums—two immense wheels, five meters in radius, by means of which the two steel cables were rolled and unrolled—turned with such rapidity that they became like gray powder.

"Look out there!" cried three landers, who were dragging an immense ladder.

Etienne just escaped being crushed; his eyes were soon more at home, and he watched the cables moving in the air, more than thirty meters of steel ribbon, which flew up into the pit frame where they passed over pulleys to descend perpendicularly into the shaft, where they were attached to the cages. An iron frame, like the high scaffolding of a belfry, supported the pulleys. It was like the gliding of a bird, noiseless, without a jar, this rapid flight, the continual come and go of a thread of enormous weight, capable of lifting twelve thousand kilograms at the rate of ten meters a second.

"Attention there, for God's sake!" cried again the landers, pushing the ladder to the other side in order to climb to the left-hand rowel. Slowly Etienne returned to the receiving room. This giant flight over his head took away his breath. Shivering in the currents of air, he watched the movement of the cages, his ears deafened by the rumbling of the trams. Near the shaft the signal was working, a heavy-levered hammer drawn by a cord from below and allowed to strike against a block. One blow to stop, two to go down, three to go up; it was unceasing, like blows of a club dominating the tumult, accompanied by the clear sound of the bell, while the landers directing the work increased the noise still more by shouting orders to the engineman through a trumpet. The cages in the middle of the clear space appeared and disappeared, were filled and emptied, without Etienne being at all able to understand the complicated proceeding.

He only understood one thing well: the shaft swallowed men by mouthfuls of twenty or thirty and with so easy a gulp that it seemed to feel nothing go down. Since four o'clock the descent of the workmen had been going on. They

came to the shed with naked feet and their lamps in their hands, waiting in little groups until a sufficient number had arrived. Without a sound, with the soft bound of a nocturnal beast, the iron cage arose from the night, wedged itself on the bolts with its four decks, each containing two trams full of coal. Landers on different platforms took out the trams and replaced them by others, either empty or already laden; and it was into the empty trams that the workmen crowded, five at a time, up to forty. When they filled all the compartments an order came from the trumpet—a hollow, indistinct roar—while the signal cord was pulled four times from below, “ringing meat,” to give warning of this burden of human flesh. Then after a slight leap the cage plunged silently, falling like a stone, only leaving behind it the vibrating flight of a cable.

“Is it deep?” asked Etienne of a miner who waited near him with a sleepy air.

“Five hundred and fifty-four meters,” replied the man. “But there are four levels, the first at three hundred and twenty.” Both were silent, with their eyes on the returning cable. Etienne said again:

“And if it breaks?”

“Ah, if it breaks——”

The miner ended with a gesture. His turn had arrived; the cage had reappeared with its easy, unfatigued movement. He squatted in it with some comrades; it plunged down, then flew up again in less than four minutes to swallow down another load of men. For half an hour the shaft went on devouring in this fashion, with more or less greedy gulps, according to the depth of the level to which the men went down, but without stopping, always hungry, with its giant intestines capable of digesting a nation. It went on filling and still filling, and the darkness remained dead. The cage mounted from the void with the same voracious silence.

Etienne was at last seized again by the same despair which he had experienced on the pit bank. What was the good of persisting? This head captain would send him off like the others. A vague fear suddenly decided him: he went away, only stopping before the building of the engine room. The wide-open door showed seven boilers with two furnaces. In the midst of the white steam and the whistling of the escapes a stoker was occupied in piling up one of the furnaces, the heat of which could be felt as far as the threshold; and the young man was approaching, glad of the warmth, when he met a new band of colliers who had just arrived at the pit. It was the Maheu and Levaque set. When he saw Catherine at the head with her gentle, boyish air a superstitious idea caused him to risk another question.

“I say there, mate, do they want a hand here for any kind of work?”

She looked at him, surprised, rather frightened at this sudden voice coming out of the shadow. But Maheu, behind her, had heard and replied, talking with Etienne for a moment. No, no one was wanted. This poor devil of a man who had lost his way here interested him. When he left him he said to the others:

“Eh! One might easily be like that. Mustn’t complain; everyone hasn’t the chance to work himself to death.”

The band entered and went straight to the shed, a vast hall roughly boarded

and surrounded by cupboards shut by padlocks. In the center an iron fireplace, a sort of closed stove without a door, glowed red and was so stuffed with burning coal that fragments flew out and rolled onto the trodden soil. The hall was lit by this stove only, from which sanguine reflections danced along the greasy woodwork up to the ceiling, stained with black dust. As the Maheus went into the heat there was a sound of laughter. Some thirty workmen were standing upright with their backs to the fire, roasting themselves with an air of enjoyment. Before going down they all came here to get a little warmth in their skins so that they could face the dampness of the pit. But this morning there was much amusement: they were joking Mouquette, a putter girl of eighteen, whose enormous breasts and flanks were bursting through her jacket and breeches. She lived at Réquillart with her father, old Mouque, a groom, and Mouquet, her brother, a lander; but their hours of work were not the same, and in the middle of the wheat fields in summer or against a wall in winter she took her pleasure with her lover of the week. All in the mine had their turn; it was a perpetual round of comrades without further consequences. One day, when reproached about a Marchiennes nail maker, she was fiercely angry, exclaiming that she respected herself far too much, that she would cut off her arm if anyone could boast that he had seen her with anyone but a collier.

"It isn't that big Chaval now?" said a miner, grinning. "That little fellow must have needed a ladder. I saw you behind Réquillart, a token that he got up on a milestone."

"Well," replied Mouquette in a good humor, "what's that to do with you? You were not asked to push."

And this gross good-natured joke increased the laughter of the men, who expanded their shoulders, half cooked by the stove, while she herself, shaken by laughter, was displaying in the midst of them the indecency of her costume, embarrassingly comical, with her masses of flesh exaggerated almost to disease.

But the gaiety ceased; Mouquette told Maheu that Fleurance, big Fleurance, would never come again; she had been found the night before stiff in her bed. Some said it was her heart, others that it was a pint of gin she had drunk too quickly. And Maheu was in despair; another piece of ill luck; one of the best of his putters gone without any chance of replacing her at once. He was working in a set; there were four pikemen associated in his cutting: himself, Zacharie, Levaque and Chaval. If they had Catherine alone to wheel the work would suffer.

Suddenly he called out:

"I have it! There was that man looking for work!"

At that moment Dansaert passed before the shed. Maheu told him the story and asked for his authority to engage the man; he emphasized the desire of the company to substitute men for women, as at Anzin. The head captain smiled at first, for the scheme of excluding women from the pit was not usually well received by the miners, who were troubled about placing their daughters and not much affected by questions of morality and health. But after some hesita-

tion he gave his permission, reserving its ratification for Mr. Négrel, the engineer.

"All very well!" exclaimed Zacharie. "The man must be away by this time."

"No," said Catherine. "I saw him stop at the boilers."

"After him then, lazy," cried Maheu.

The young girl ran forward, while a crowd of miners proceeded to the shaft, yielding the fire to others.

Jeanlin, without waiting for his father, went also to take his lamp, together with Bébert, a big, stupid boy, and Lydie, a small child of ten. Mouquette, who was in front of them, called out in the black passage that they were dirty brats and threatened to box their ears if they pinched her.

Etienne was, in fact, in the boiler building, talking with a stoker, who was charging the furnaces with coal. He felt very cold at the thought of the night into which he must return. But he was deciding to set out when he felt a hand placed on his shoulder.

"Come," said Catherine; "there's something for you."

At first he could not understand. Then he felt a spasm of joy and vigorously squeezed the young girl's hands.

"Thanks, mate. Ah, you're a good chap, you are!"

She began to laugh, looking at him in the red light of the furnaces which lit them up. It amused her that he should take her for a boy, still slender, with her knot of hair hidden beneath the cap. He also was laughing with satisfaction, and they remained for a moment, both laughing in each other's faces with radiant cheeks.

Maheu, squatting down before his box in the shed, was taking off his sabots and his coarse woollen stockings. When Etienne arrived everything was settled in three or four words: thirty sous a day, hard work, but work that he would easily learn. The pikeman advised him to keep his shoes and lent him an old cap, a leather hat for the protection of his skull, a precaution which the father and his children disdained. The tools were taken out of the chest, where also was found Fleurance's shovel. Then when Maheu had shut up their sabots, their stockings, as well as Etienne's bundle, he suddenly became impatient.

"What is that ass Chaval up to? Another girl turned up on a pile of stones? We are half an hour late today."

Zacharie and Levaque were quietly roasting their shoulders. The former said at last:

"Is it Chaval you're waiting for? He came before us and went down at once."

"What! You knew that and said nothing? Come, come, look sharp!"

Catherine, who was warming her hands, had to follow the band. Etienne allowed her to pass and went behind her. Again he journeyed through a maze of staircases and obscure corridors in which their naked feet produced the soft sound of old slippers. But the lamp cabin was glittering—a glass house full of hooks in rows, holding hundreds of Davy lamps, examined and washed the night before and lit like candles in chapel. At the barrier each workman took his own, stamped with his number; then he examined it and shut it himself, while the marker, seated at a table, inscribed on the registers the hour of descent.

Maheu had to intervene to obtain a lamp for his new putter, and there was still another precaution: the workers defiled before an examiner, who assured himself that all the lamps were properly closed.

"Golly! It's not warm here," murmured Catherine, shivering.

Etienne contented himself with nodding his head. He was in front of the shaft, in the midst of a vast hall swept by currents of air. He certainly considered himself brave, but he felt a disagreeable emotion at his chest amid this thunder of trams, the hollow blows of the signals, the stifled howling of the trumpet, the continual flight of those cables, unrolled and rolled at full speed by the drums of the engine. The cages rose and sank with the gliding movement of a nocturnal beast, always engulfing men, whom the throat of the hole seemed to drink. It was his turn now. He felt very cold and preserved a nervous silence which made Zacharie and Levaque grin, for both of them disapproved of the hiring of this unknown man, especially Levaque, who was offended that he had not been consulted. So Catherine was glad to hear her father explain things to the young man.

"Look! Above the cage there is a parachute with iron grapnels to catch into the guides in case of breakage. Does it work? Oh, not always. Yes, the shaft is divided into three compartments, closed by planking from top to bottom; in the middle, the cages; on the left, the passage for the ladders—"

But he interrupted himself to grumble, though taking care not to raise his voice much.

"What are we stuck here for, blast it? What right have they to freeze us in this way?"

The captain, Richomme, who was going down himself with his naked lamp fixed by a nail into the leather of his cap, heard him.

"Careful! Look out for ears," he murmured paternally as an old miner with an affectionate feeling for comrades. "Workmen must do what they can. Hold! Here we are; get in with your fellows."

The cage, provided with iron bands and a small-meshed latticework, was, in fact, awaiting them on the bars. Maheu, Zacharie and Catherine slid into a tram below, and as all five had to enter, Etienne in his turn went in, but the good places were taken; he had to squeeze himself near the young girl, whose elbow pressed into his belly. His lamp embarrassed him; they advised him to fasten it to the buttonhole of his jacket. Not hearing, he awkwardly kept it in his hand. The embarkation continued above and below, a confused packing of cattle. They did not, however, set out. What then was happening? It seemed to him that his impatience lasted for many minutes. At last he felt a shock, and the light grew dim; everything around him seemed to fly, while he experienced the dizzy anxiety of a fall contracting his bowels. This lasted as long as he could see light through the two reception stories in the midst of the whirling by of the scaffolding. Then having fallen into the blackness of the pit, he became stunned, no longer having any clear perception of his sensations.

"Now we are off," said Maheu quietly.

They were all at their ease. He asked himself at times if he were going up or down. Now and then, when the cage went straight without touching the

guides, there seemed to be no motion, but rough shocks were afterward produced, a sort of dancing amid the joists, which made him fear a catastrophe. For the rest, he could not distinguish the walls of the shaft behind the lattice-work, to which he pressed his face. The lamps feebly lit the mass of bodies at his feet. Only the captain's naked light in the neighboring tram shone like a lighthouse.

"This is four meters in diameter," continued Maheu, to instruct him. "The tubbing wants doing over again, for the water comes in everywhere. Stop! We are reaching the bottom; do you hear?"

Etienne was, in fact, now asking himself the meaning of this noise of falling rain. A few large drops had at first sounded on the roof of the cage, like the beginning of a shower, and now the rain increased, streaming down, becoming at last a deluge. The roof must be full of holes, for a thread of water was flowing onto his shoulder and wetting him to the skin. The cold became icy, and they were buried in black humidity, when they passed through a sudden flash of light, the vision of a cavern in which men were moving. But already they had fallen back into darkness.

Maheu said:

"That is the first main level. We are at three hundred and twenty meters. See the speed."

Raising his lamp, he lit up a joist of the guides which fled by like a rail beneath a train going at full speed; and beyond, as before, nothing could be seen. They passed three other levels in flashes of light. The deafening rain continued to strike through the darkness.

"How deep it is!" murmured Etienne.

This fall seemed to last for hours. He was suffering for the cramped position he had taken, not daring to move and especially tortured by Catherine's elbow. She did not speak a word; he only felt her against him, and it warmed him. When the cage at last stopped at the bottom, at five hundred and fifty-four meters, he was astonished to learn that the descent had lasted exactly one minute. But the noise of the bolts fixing themselves, the sensation of solidity beneath, suddenly cheered him, and he was joking when he said to Catherine:

"What have you got under your skin that's so warm? I've got your elbow in my belly, sure enough."

Then she also burst out laughing. Stupid of him still to take her for a boy! Were his eyes out?

"It's in your eye that you've got my elbow!" she replied in the midst of a storm of laughter which the astonished young man could not explain.

The cage voided its burden of workers, who crossed the pit-eye hall, a chamber cut in the rock, vaulted with masonry and lit up by three large lamps. Over the iron flooring the porters were violently rolling laden trams. A cavernous odor exhaled from the walls, a freshness of saltpeter in which mingled hot breaths from the neighboring stable. The openings of four galleries yawned here.

"This way," said Maheu to Etienne. "You're not there yet. It is still two good kilometers."

The workmen separated and were lost in groups in the depths of these black holes. Some fifteen went off into that on the left, and Etienne walked last, behind Maheu, who was preceded by Catherine, Zacharie and Levaque. It was a large gallery for wagons, through a bed of solid rock, which had only needed walling here and there. In single file they still went on without a word by the tiny flame of the lamps. The young man stumbled at every step and entangled his feet in the rails. For a moment a hollow sound disturbed him, the sound of a distant storm, the violence of which seemed to increase and to come from the bowels of the earth. Was it the thunder of a landslip bringing onto their heads the enormous mass which separated them from the light? A gleam pierced the night; he felt the rock tremble, and when he had placed himself close to the wall, like his comrades, he saw a large white horse close to his face, harnessed to a train of wagons. On the first and holding the reins was seated Bébert, while Jeanlin, with his hands fastened to the edge of the last, was running barefooted behind.

They again began their walk. Farther on they reached crossways, where two new galleries opened, and the band divided again, the workers gradually entering all the stalls of the mine.

Now the wagon gallery was constructed of wood; props of timber supported the roof and made for the crumbly rock a screen of scaffolding, behind which one could see the plates of schist glimmering with mica and the coarse masses of dull, rough sandstone. Trains of tubs, full or empty, continually passed, crossing each other with their thunder, borne into the shadow by vague beasts trotting by like phantoms. On the double way of a shunting line a long, black serpent slept, a train at standstill, with a snorting horse, his crupper looking like a block fallen from the roof. Doors for ventilation were slowly opening and shutting. And as they advanced the gallery became narrower and lower and the roof irregular, forcing them to bend their backs constantly.

Etienne struck his head hard; without his leather cap he would have broken his skull. However, he attentively followed the slightest gestures of Maheu, whose somber profile was seen against the glimmer of the lamps. None of the workmen knocked themselves; they evidently knew each boss, each knot of wood or swelling in the rock. The young man also suffered from the slippery soil, which became damper and damper. At times he went through actual puddles, only revealed by the muddy splash of his feet. But what especially astonished him were the sudden changes of temperature. At the bottom of the shaft it was very fresh, and in the wagon gallery, through which all the air of the mine passed, an icy breeze was blowing with the violence of a tempest between the narrow walls. Afterward, as they penetrated more deeply along other passages which only received a meager share of air, the wind fell and the heat increased, a suffocating heat as heavy as lead.

Maheu had not again opened his mouth. He turned down another gallery to the right, simply saying to Etienne without looking round:

"The Guillaume seam."

It was the seam which contained their cutting. At the first step Etienne hurt his head and elbows. The sloping roof descended so low that for twenty or

thirty meters at a time he had to walk bent double. The water came up to his ankles. After two hundred meters of this he saw Levaque, Zacharie and Catherine disappear, as though they had flown through a narrow fissure which was open in front of him.

"We must climb," said Maheu. "Fasten your lamp to a buttonhole and hang onto the wood." He himself disappeared, and Etienne had to follow him. This chimney passage left in the seam was reserved for miners and led to all the secondary passages. It was about the thickness of the coal bed, hardly sixty centimeters. Fortunately the young man was thin, for as he was still awkward, he hoisted himself up with a useless expense of muscle, flattening his shoulders and hips, advancing by the strength of his wrists, clinging to the planks. Fifteen meters higher they came on the first secondary passage, but they had to continue, as the cutting of Maheu and his mates was in the sixth passage, in hell, as they said; every fifteen meters the passages were placed over each other in never-ending succession through this cleft, which scraped back and chest. Etienne groaned as if the weight of the rocks had pounded his limbs; with torn hands and bruised legs he also suffered from lack of air, so that he seemed to feel the blood bursting through his skin. He vaguely saw in one passage two squatting beasts, a big one and a little one, pushing trams: they were Lydie and Mouquette already at work. And he had still to climb the height of two cuttings! He was blinded by sweat, and he despaired of catching up with the others, whose agile limbs he heard brushing against the rock with a long gliding movement.

"Cheer up! Here we are!" said Catherine's voice.

He had, in fact, arrived, and another voice cried from the bottom of the cutting:

"Well, is this the way to treat people? I have two kilometers to walk from Montsou and I'm here first."

It was Chaval, a tall, lean, bony fellow of twenty-five with strongly marked features, who was in a bad humor at having to wait. When he saw Etienne he asked with contemptuous surprise:

"What's that?"

And when Maheu had told him the story he added between his teeth:

"These men are eating the bread of girls."

The two men exchanged a look, lit up by one of those instinctive hatreds which suddenly flame up. Etienne had felt the insult without yet understanding it. There was silence, and they got to work. At last all the seams were gradually filled, and the cuttings were in movement at every level and at the end of every passage. The devouring shaft had swallowed its daily ration of men, nearly seven hundred hands, who were now at work in this giant anthill, everywhere making holes in the earth, drilling it like an old worm-eaten piece of wood. And in the middle of the heavy silence and crushing weight of the strata one could hear by placing one's ear to the rock the movement of these human insects at work, from the flight of the cable which moved the cage up and down to the biting of the tools cutting out the coal at the end of the stalls. Etienne, on turning round, found himself again pressed close to Catherine. But

this time he caught a glimpse of the developing curves of her breast; he suddenly understood the warmth which had penetrated him.

"You are a girl then!" he exclaimed, stupefied.

She replied in her cheerful way, without blushing:

"Of course. You've taken your time to find it out!"

CHAPTER IV

THE FOUR PIKEMEN had spread themselves one above the other over the whole face of the cutting. Separated by planks hooked on to retain the fallen coal, they each occupied about four meters of the seam, and this seam was so thin, scarcely more than fifty centimeters thick at this spot, that they seemed to be flattened between the roof and the wall, dragging themselves along by their knees and elbows and unable to turn without crushing their shoulders. In order to attack the coal they had to lie on their sides with their arms raised, brandishing in a sloping direction their short-handled picks.

Below there was, first, Zacharie; Levaque and Chaval were on the stages above, and at the very top was Maheu. Each worked at the slaty bed, which he dug out with blows of the pick; then he made two vertical cuttings in the bed and detached the block by burying an iron wedge in its upper part. The coal was rich; the block broke and rolled in fragments along their bellies and thighs. When these fragments retained by the plank had collected round them, the pikemen disappeared, buried in the narrow cleft.

Maheu suffered most. At the top the temperature rose to thirty-five degrees, and the air was stagnant, so that in the long run it became lethal. In order to see he had been obliged to fix his lamp to a nail near his head, and this lamp, close to his skull, still further heated his blood. But his torment was especially aggravated by the moisture. The rock above him, a few centimeters from his face, streamed with water, which fell in large, continuous, rapid drops with a sort of obstinate rhythm, always at the same spot. It was vain for him to twist his head or bend back his neck. They fell on his face, dropping unceasingly. In a quarter of an hour he was soaked and at the same time covered with sweat, smoking as with the hot steam of a laundry. This morning a drop beating upon his eye made him swear. He would not leave his picking; he dealt great strokes which shook him violently between the two rocks, like a fly caught between two leaves of a book and in danger of being completely flattened.

Not a word was exchanged. They all hammered; one only heard these irregular blows, which seemed veiled and remote. The sounds had a sonorous hoarseness, without any echo in the dead air. And it seemed that the darkness was an unknown blackness, thickened by the floating coal dust, made heavy by the gas which weighed on the eyes. The wicks of the lamps beneath their caps of metallic tissue only showed as reddish points. One could distinguish nothing. The cutting opened out above like a large chimney, flat and oblique, in which the soot of ten years had amassed a profound night. Spectral figures were moving in it; the gleams of light enabled one to catch a glimpse of a rounded hip,

a knotty arm, a vigorous head, besmeared as if for a crime. Sometimes blocks of coal shone suddenly as they became detached, illuminated by a crystalline reflection. Then everything fell back into darkness; pickaxes struck great hollow blows; one only heard panting chests, the grunting of discomfort and weariness beneath the weight of the air and the rain of the springs.

Zacharie, with arms weakened by a spree of the night before, soon left his work on the pretense that more timbering was necessary. This allowed him to forget himself in quiet whistling, his eyes vaguely resting in the shade. Behind the pikemen nearly three meters of the seam were clear, and they had not yet taken the precaution of supporting the rock, having grown careless of danger and miserly of their time.

"Here, you swell," cried the young man to Etienne, "hand up some wood."

Etienne, who was learning from Catherine how to manage his shovel, had to forget the wood in the cutting. A small supply had remained over from yesterday. It was usually sent down every morning, ready cut to fit in the bed.

"Hurry up there, damn it!" shouted Zacharie, seeing the new putter hoist himself up awkwardly in the midst of the coal, his arms embarrassed by four pieces of oak.

He made a hole in the roof with his pickax and then another in the wall and wedged in the two ends of the wood, which thus supported the rock. In the afternoon the workers in the earth cutting took the rubbish left at the bottom of the gallery by the pikemen and cleared out the exhausted section of the seam, in which they destroyed the wood, being only careful about the lower and upper roads for the haulage.

Maheu ceased to groan. At last he had detached his block, and he wiped his streaming face on his sleeve. He was disturbed as to what Zacharie was doing behind him.

"Let it be," he said; "we will see after breakfast. Better go on hewing if we want to make up our share of trams."

"It's because it's sinking," replied the young man. "Look, there's a crack. It may slip."

But the father shrugged his shoulders. Ah, nonsense! Slip! And if it did it would not be the first time; they would get out of it all right. He grew angry at last and sent his son to the front of the cutting.

All of them, however, were now stretching themselves. Levaque, resting on his back, was swearing as he examined his left thumb, which had been grazed by the fall of a piece of sandstone. Chaval had taken off his shirt in a fury and was working with bare chest and back for the sake of coolness. They were already black with coal, soaked in a fine dust diluted with sweat, which ran down in streams and pools. Maheu first began again to hammer lower down, with his head level with the rock. Now the drop struck his forehead so obstinately that he seemed to feel it piercing a hole in the bone of his skull.

"You mustn't mind," explained Catherine to Etienne; "they are always howling."

And like a good-natured girl, she went on with her lesson. Every laden tram arrived at the top in the same condition as it left the cutting, marked with a

special metal token so that the receiver might put it to the reckoning of the stall. It was necessary, therefore, to be very careful to fill it and only to take clean coal; otherwise it was refused at the receiving office.

The young man, whose eyes now became accustomed to the darkness, looked at her, still white with her chlorotic complexion, and he could not have told her age; he thought she must be twelve; she seemed to him so slight. However, he felt she must be older, with her boyish freedom, a simple audacity which confused him a little. She did not please him: he thought her too roguish with her pale Pierrot head, framed at the temples by the cap. But what astonished him was the strength of this child, a nervous strength which was blended with a good deal of skill. She filled her tram faster than he could, with quick, small, regular strokes of the shovel; she afterward pushed it to the inclined way with a single slow push, without a hitch, easily passing under the low rocks. He tore himself to pieces, got off the rails and was reduced to despair.

It was certainly not a convenient road. It was sixty meters from the cutting to the upbrow, and the passage, which the miners in the earth cutting had not yet enlarged, was a mere tube with a very irregular roof swollen by innumerable bosses; at certain spots the laden tram could only just pass; the putter had to flatten himself, to push on his knees, in order not to break his head, and, besides this, the wood was already bending and yielding. One could see it broken in the middle in long, pale rents like an overweak crutch. One had to be careful not to graze oneself in these fractures, and beneath the slow crushing, which caused the splitting of billets of oak as large as the thigh, one had to glide almost on one's belly with a secret fear of suddenly hearing one's back break.

"Again!" said Catherine, laughing.

Etienne's tram had gone off the rails at the most difficult spot. He could not roll straight on these rails which sank in the damp earth, and he swore, became angry and fought furiously with the wheels, which he could not get back into place in spite of exaggerated efforts.

"Wait a bit," said the young girl. "If you get angry it will never go." Skillfully she had glided down, had thrust her buttocks beneath the tram, and by putting the weight on her loins she raised it and replaced it. The weight was seven hundred kilograms. Surprised and ashamed, he stammered excuses.

She was obliged to show him how to separate his legs to support his feet against the planking on both sides of the gallery in order to give himself a more solid fulcrum. The body had to be bent, the arms made stiff, so as to push with all the muscles of the shoulders and hips. During the journey he followed her and watched her proceed with tense back, her fists so low that she seemed trotting on all fours, like one of those dwarf beasts that perform at circuses. She sweat, panted; her joints cracked, but without a complaint, with the indifference of custom, as if it were the common wretchedness of all to live thus, bent double. But he could not succeed in doing as much; his shoes troubled him; his body seemed broken by walking in this way with lowered head. At the end of a few minutes the position became a torture, an intolerable anguish, so painful that he got on his knees for a moment to straighten himself and breathe.

Then at the upbrow there was more labor. She taught him to fill his tram quickly. At the top and bottom of this inclined plane, which served all the cuttings from one level to the other, there was a trammer—the brakesman above, the receiver below. These scamps of twelve to fifteen years shouted abominable words to each other, and to warn them it was necessary to yell still more violently. Then as soon as there was an empty tram to send back the receiver gave the signal and the putter embarked her tram, the weight of which made the other ascend when the brakesman loosened his brake. Below, in the bottom gallery, were formed trains which the horses drew to the shaft.

“Here, you confounded rascals,” cried Catherine in the inclined way, which was wood-lined, about a hundred meters long, and resounded like a gigantic trumpet.

The trammers must have been resting, for neither of them replied. On all the levels haulage had stopped. A shrill girl’s voice said at last:

“One of them must be on Mouquette, sure enough!”

There was a roar of laughter, and the putters of the whole seam held their sides.

“Who is that?” asked Etienne of Catherine.

The latter named little Lydie, a scamp who knew more than she ought and who pushed her train as stoutly as a woman, in spite of her doll’s arms. As to Mouquette, she was quite capable of being with both the trammers at once.

But the voice of the receiver arose, shouting out to load. Doubtless a captain was passing beneath. Haulage began again on the nine levels, and one only heard the regular calls of the trammers and the snorting of the putters arriving at the upbrow and steaming like overladen mares. It was the clement of bestiality which breathed in the pit, the sudden desire of the male when a miner met one of these girls on all fours, with her flanks in the air and her hips bursting through her boy’s breeches.

And on each journey Etienne found again at the bottom the stuffiness of the cutting, the hollow and broken cadence of the axes, the deep, painful sighs of the pikemen persisting in their work. All four were naked, mixed up with the coal, soaked with black mud up to the cap. At one moment it had been necessary to free Maheu, who was gasping, and to remove the planks so that the coal could fall into the passage. Zacharie and Lavaque became enraged with the seam, which was now hard, they said, and which would make the condition of their account disastrous. Chaval turned, lying for a moment on his back, abusing Etienne, whose presence decidedly exasperated him.

“A sort of worm; hasn’t the strength of a girl! Are you going to fill your tub? It’s to spare your arms, eh? Damned if I don’t keep back the ten sous if you get us one refused!”

The young man avoided replying, too happy at present to have found this convict’s labor and accepting the brutal rule of the worker by master worker. But he could no longer walk; his feet were bleeding, his limbs torn by horrible cramps, his body confined in an iron girdle. Fortunately it was ten o’clock, and the stall decided to have breakfast.

Maheu had a watch, but he did not even look at it. At the bottom of this

starless night he was never five minutes out. All put on their shirts and jackets. Then descending from the cutting, they squatted down, their elbows to their sides, their buttocks on their heels, in that posture so habitual with miners that they keep it even when out of the mine, without feeling the need of a stone or a beam to sit on. And each, having taken out his brick, bit seriously at the thick slice, uttering occasional words on the morning's work. Catherine, who remained standing, at last joined Etienne, who had stretched himself out farther along, across the rails, with his back against the planking. There was a place there almost dry.

"You don't eat," she said to him with her mouth full and her brick in her hand.

Then she remembered that this youth, wandering about at night without a sou, perhaps had not a bit of bread.

"Will you share with me?"

And as he refused, declaring that he was not hungry while his voice trembled with the gnawing in his stomach, she went on cheerfully:

"Ah, if you are fastidious! But here, I've only bitten on that side. I'll give you this."

She had already broken the bread and butter into two pieces. The young man, taking his half, restrained himself from devouring it all at once and placed his arms on his thighs, so that she should not see how he trembled. With her quiet air of good comradeship she lay beside him at full length on her stomach, with her chin in one hand, slowly eating with the other. Their lamps, placed between them, lit up their faces.

Catherine looked at him a moment in silence. She must have found him handsome with his delicate face and black mustache. She vaguely smiled with pleasure.

"Then you are an engine driver, and they sent you away from your railway. Why?"

"Because I struck my chief."

She remained stupefied, overwhelmed with her hereditary ideas of subordination and passive obedience.

"I ought to say that I had been drinking," he went on, "and when I drink I get mad—I could devour myself and I could devour other people. Yes; I can't swallow two small glasses without wanting to kill someone. Then I am ill for two days."

"You mustn't drink," she said seriously.

"Ah, don't be afraid. I know myself."

And he shook his head. He hated brandy with the hatred of the last child of a race of drunkards who suffered in his flesh from all those ancestors, soaked and driven mad by alcohol, to such a point that the least drop had become poison to him.

"It is because of Mother that I didn't like being turned into the street," he said after having swallowed a mouthful. "Mother is not happy, and I used to send her a five-franc piece now and then."

"Where is she then, your mother?"

"At Paris. Laundress, Rue de la Goutte-d'Or."

There was silence. When he thought of these things a tremor dimmed his dark eyes, the sudden anguish of the injury he brooded over in his fine, youthful strength. For a moment he remained with his looks buried in the darkness of the mine; and at that depth, beneath the weight and suffocation of the earth, he saw his childhood again, his mother still beautiful and strong, forsaken by his father, then taken up again after having married another man, living with the two men who ruined her, rolling with them in the gutter in drink and ordure. It was down there he recalled the street; the details came back to him: the dirty linen in the middle of the shop, the drunken carousals that made the house stink and the jaw-breaking blows.

"Now," he began again in a slow voice, "I haven't even thirty sous to make her presents with. She will die of misery, sure enough."

He shrugged his shoulders with despair and again bit at his bread and butter.

"Will you drink?" asked Catherine, uncorking her tin. "Oh, it's coffee; it won't hurt you. One gets stupid when one drinks like that."

But he refused; it was quite enough to have taken half her bread. However, she insisted good-naturedly and said at last:

"Well, I will drink before you since you are so polite. Only you can't refuse now; it would be rude."

She held out her tin to him. She had got onto her knees, and he saw her quite close to him, lit up by the two lamps. Why had he found her ugly? Now that she was black, her face powdered with fine charcoal, she seemed to him singularly charming. In this face surrounded by shadow the teeth in the broad mouth shone with whiteness, while the eyes looked large and gleamed with a greenish reflection, like cat's eyes. A lock of red hair which had escaped from her cap tickled her ear and made her laugh. She no longer seemed so young; she might be quite fourteen.

"To please you," he said, drinking and giving her back the tin.

She swallowed a second mouthful and forced him to take one, too, wishing to share, she said; and that little tin that went from one mouth to the other amused them. He suddenly asked himself if he should not take her in his arms and kiss her lips. She had large lips of a pale rose color, made vivid by the coal, which tormented him with increasing desire. But he did not dare, intimidated before her, only having known girls on the streets at Lille of the lowest order and not realizing how one ought to behave with a workgirl still living with her family.

"You must be about fourteen then?" he asked after having gone back to his bread.

She was astonished, almost angry.

"What? Fourteen! But I am fifteen! It's true I'm not big. Girls don't grow quick with us."

He went on questioning her and she told everything without boldness or shame. For the rest, she was not ignorant concerning man and woman, although he felt that her body was virginal, with the virginity of a child delayed in her sexual maturity by the environment of bad air and weariness in which

she lived. When he spoke of Mouquette in order to embarrass her she told some horrible stories in a quiet voice, with much amusement. Ah, she did some fine things! And as he asked if she herself had no lovers, she replied jokingly that she did not wish to vex her mother but that it must happen someday. Her shoulders were bent. She shivered a little from the coldness of her garments soaked in sweat with a gentle, resigned air, ready to submit to things and men.

"People can find lovers when they all live together, can't they?"

"Sure enough!"

"And then it doesn't hurt anyone. One doesn't tell the priest."

"Oh, the priest! I don't care for him! But there is the Black Man."

"What? Black Man?"

"The old miner who comes back into the pit and wrings naughty girls' necks."

He looked at her, afraid that she was making fun of him.

"You believe in those stupid things? Then you don't know anything."

"Yes, I do. I can read and write. That is useful among us; in Father's and Mother's time they learned nothing."

She was certainly very charming. When she had finished her bread and butter he would take her and kiss her on her large rosy lips. It was the resolution of timidity, a thought of violence, which choked his voice. These boy's clothes—this jacket and these breeches—on the girl's flesh excited and troubled him. He had swallowed his last mouthful. He drank from the tin and gave it back for her to empty. Now the moment for action had come, and he cast a reckless glance at the miners farther on. But a shadow blocked the gallery.

For a moment Chaval stood and looked at them from afar. He came forward, having assured himself that Maheu could not see him; and as Catherine was seated on the earth he seized her by the shoulders, drew her head back and tranquilly crushed her mouth beneath a brutal kiss, affecting not to notice Etienne. There was in that kiss an act of possession, a sort of jealous resolution.

However, the young girl was offended.

"Let me go, do you hear?"

He kept hold of her head and looked into her eyes. His mustache and small red beard flamed in his black face with its large eagle nose. He let her go at last and went away without speaking a word.

A shudder had frozen Etienne. It was stupid to have waited. He could certainly not kiss her now, for she would, perhaps, think that he wished to behave like the other. In his wounded vanity he experienced real despair.

"Why did you lie?" he said in a low voice. "He's your lover."

"But, no, I swear," she cried. "There is not that between us. Sometimes he likes a joke; he doesn't even belong here; it's six months since he came from the Pas-de-Calais."

Both rose; work was about to be resumed. When she saw him so cold she seemed annoyed. Doubtless she found him handsomer than the other; she would have preferred him, perhaps. The idea of some amiable, consoling relationship disturbed her, and when the young man saw with surprise that his lamp was burning blue with a large pale ring, she tried at least to amuse him.

"Come, I will show you something," she said in a friendly way.

When she had led him to the bottom of the cutting she pointed out to him a crevice in the coal. A slight bubbling escaped from it, a little noise like the warbling of a bird.

"Put your hand there; you'll feel the wind. It's firedamp."

He was surprised. Was that all? Was that the terrible thing which blew everything up? She laughed; she said there was a good deal of it today to make the flame of the lamps so blue.

"Now if you've done chattering, lazy louts!" cried Maheu's rough voice.

Catherine and Etienne hastened to fill their trams and pushed them to the upbrow with stiffened back, crawling beneath the bossy roof of the passage. Even after the second journey the sweat ran off them and their joints began to crack.

The pikemen had resumed work in the cutting. The men often shortened their breakfast to avoid getting cold, and their bricks, eaten in this way, far from the sun, with silent voracity, loaded their stomachs with lead. Stretched on their sides, they hammered more loudly with the one fixed idea of filling a large number of trams. Every thought disappeared in this rage for gain which was so hard to earn. They no longer felt the water which streamed on them and swelled their limbs, the cramps of forced attitudes, the suffocation of the darkness in which they grew pale, like plants put in a cellar. Yet as the day advanced the air became more poisoned and heated with the smoke of the lamps, with the pestilence of their breaths, with the asphyxia of the firedamp—blinding to the eyes like spiders' webs—which only the aeration of the night could sweep away. At the bottom of their molehill, beneath the weight of the earth, with no more breath in their inflamed lungs, they went on hammering.

CHAPTER V

MAHEU, without looking at his watch, which he had left in his jacket, stopped and said:

"One o'clock directly. Zacharie, is it done?"

The young man had just been at the planking. In the midst of his labor he had been lying on his back with dreamy eyes, thinking over a game of hockey of the night before. He woke up and replied:

"Yes, it will do; we shall see tomorrow."

And he came back to take his place at the cutting. Levaque and Chaval had also dropped their picks. They were all resting. They wiped their faces on their naked arms and looked at the roof, in which slaty masses were cracking. They only spoke about their work.

"Another chance," murmured Chaval, "of getting into loose earth. They didn't take account of that in the bargain."

"Rascals!" growled Levaque. "They only want to bury us in it."

Zacharie began to laugh. He cared little for the work and the rest, but it amused him to hear the company abused. In his placid way Maheu explained that the nature of the soil changed every twenty meters. "We could not foresee

this and we must be just." Then when the two others went on talking against the masters he became restless and looked around him.

"Hush! That's enough."

"You're right," said Levaque, also lowering his voice; "it isn't wholesome."

A morbid dread of spies haunted them, even at this depth, as if the shareholders' coal, while still in the seam, might have ears.

"That won't prevent me," added Chaval loudly in a defiant manner, "from lodging a brick in the belly of that damned Dansaert if he talks to me as he did the other day. I won't prevent him, I won't, from buying pretty girls with a white skin."

This time Zacharie burst out laughing. The head captain's love for Pierronne was a constant joke in the pit. Even Catherine rested on her shovel at the bottom of the cutting, holding her sides, and in a few words told Etienne the joke, while Maheu became angry, seized by a fear which he could not conceal.

"Will you hold your tongue, eh? Wait till you're alone if you want to get into trouble."

He was still speaking when the sound of steps was heard in the upper gallery. Almost immediately the engineer of the mine, little Négrel, as the workmen called him among themselves, appeared at the top of the cutting, accompanied by Dansaert, the head captain.

"Didn't I say so?" muttered Maheu. "There's always someone there, rising out of the ground."

Paul Négrel, M. Hennebeau's nephew, was a young man of twenty-six, refined and handsome, with curly hair and brown mustache. His pointed nose and sparkling eyes gave him the air of an amiable ferret of skeptical intelligence, which changed into an abrupt authoritative manner in his relations with the workmen. He was dressed like them and, like them, smeared with coal; to make them respect him he exhibited a daredevil courage, passing through the most difficult spots and always first when landslips or firedamp explosions occurred.

"Here we are, are we not, Dansaert?" he asked.

The head captain, a coarse-faced Belgian with a large, sensual nose, replied with exaggerated politeness:

"Yes, Monsieur Négrel. Here is the man who was taken on this morning."

Both of them had slid down into the middle of the cutting. They made Etienne come up. The engineer raised his lamp and looked at him without asking any questions.

"Good," he said at last. "But I don't like unknown men to be picked up from the road. Don't do it again."

He did not listen to the explanations given to him, the necessities of work, the desire to replace women by men for the haulage. He had begun to examine the roof while the pikemen had taken up their picks again. Suddenly he called out:

"I say there, Maheu, have you no care for life? By heavens! You will all be buried here!"

"Oh, it's solid," replied the workman tranquilly.

"What? Solid? But the rock is giving already, and you are planting props at more than two meters, as if you grudged it! Ah, you are all alike. You will let your skull be flattened rather than leave the seam to give the necessary time to the timbering! I must ask you to prop that immediately. Double the timbering—do you understand?"

And in face of the unwillingness of the miners who disputed the point, saying that they were good judges of their safety, he became angry.

"Go along! When your head is smashed, is it you who will have to bear the consequences? Not at all! It will be the company which will have to pay you pensions, you or your wives. I tell you again that we know you; in order to get two extra trams by evening you would sell your skins."

Maheu, in spite of the anger which was gradually mastering him, still answered steadily:

"If they paid us enough we should prop it better."

The engineer shrugged his shoulders without replying. He had descended the cutting and only said in conclusion from below:

"You have an hour. Put yourselves to the work, all of you, and I give you notice that the stall has a fine of three francs."

A low growl from the pikemen greeted these words. The force of the system alone restrained them, that military system which, from the trammer to the head captain, ground one beneath the other. Chaval and Levaque, however, made a furious gesture, while Maheu restrained them by a glance, and Zacharie shrugged his shoulders chaffingly. But Etienne was, perhaps, most affected. Since he had found himself at the bottom of this hell a slow rebellion was rising within him. He looked at the resigned Catherine with her lowered back. Was it possible to kill oneself at this hard toil, in this deadly darkness, and not even to gain the few pence to buy one's daily bread?

However, Négrel went off with Dansaert, who was content to approve by a continual movement of his head. And their voices again rose; they had just stopped once more and were examining the timbering in the gallery, which the pikemen were obliged to look after for a length of ten meters behind the cutting.

"Didn't I tell you that they care nothing?" cried the engineer. "And you! Why in the devil's name don't you watch them?"

"But I do—I do," stammered the head captain. "One gets tired of repeating things."

Négrel called loudly:

"Maheu! Maheu!"

They all came down. He went on:

"Do you see that? Will that hold? It's a twopenny-halfpenny construction! Here is a beam which the posts don't carry already; it is done so hastily. By Jove! I understand how it is that the mending costs us so much. It 'll do, won't it? if it lasts as long as you have the care of it. And then it may go smash, and the company is obliged to have an army of repairers. Look at it down there; it is mere botching!"

Chaval wished to speak, but he silenced him.

"No! I know what you are going to say. Let them pay you more, eh? Very well! I warn you that you will force the managers to do something: they will pay you the planking separately and proportionately reduce the price of the trams. We shall see if you will gain that way! Meanwhile prop that over again, at once; I shall pass tomorrow."

Amid the dismay caused by this threat he went away. Dansaert, who had been so humble, remained behind a few moments to say brutally to the men:

"You get me into a row, you here. I'll give you something more than three francs' fine, I will. Look out!"

Then when he had gone Maheu broke out in his turn:

"By God! What's fair is fair! I like people to be calm, because that's the only way of getting along, but at last they make you mad. Did you hear? The tram lowered, and the planking separately! Another way of paying us less. By God, it is!"

He looked for someone upon whom to vent his anger and saw Catherine and Etienne swinging their arms.

"Will you just fetch me some wood! What does it matter to you? I'll put my foot into you somewhere!"

Etienne went to carry it without rancor for this rough speech, so furious himself against the masters that he thought the miners too good-natured. As for the others, Levaque and Chaval had found relief in strong language. All of them, even Zacharie, were timbering furiously. For nearly half an hour one only heard the creaking of wood wedged in by blows of the hammer. They no longer spoke; they snorted, became enraged with the rock, which they would have hustled and driven back by the force of their shoulders if they had been able.

"That's enough," said Maheu at last, worn out with anger and fatigue. "An hour and a half! A fine day's work! We shan't get fifty sous! I'm off. This disgusts me."

Though there was still half an hour of work left he dressed himself. The others imitated him. The mere sight of the cutting enraged them. As the putter had gone back to the haulage they called her, irritated at her zeal; let the coal go out alone. And the six, their tools under their arms, set out to walk the two kilometers back, returning to the shaft by the road of the morning.

On the way Catherine and Etienne were delayed while the pikemen slid down. They met little Lydie, who stopped in a gallery to let them pass and told them of the disappearance of Mouquette, whose nose had been bleeding so much that she had been away an hour, bathing her face somewhere; no one knew where. Then when they left her the child began again to push her tram, knocked up and muddy, stiffening her insectlike arms and legs like a lean black ant struggling with a load that was too heavy for it. They let themselves down on their backs, flattening their shoulders for fear of scratching the skin on their foreheads, and they walked so closely to the polished rock at the back of the stalls that they were obliged from time to time to hold onto the woodwork so that their backsides should not catch fire, as they said jokingly.

Below they found themselves alone. Red stars disappeared afar at a bend in

the passage. Their cheerfulness felt; they began to walk with the heavy step of fatigue, she in front, he behind. Their lamps were blackened. He could scarcely see her, drowned in a sort of smoky mist, and the idea that she was a girl disturbed him because he felt that it was stupid not to embrace her, and yet the recollection of the other man prevented him. Certainly she had lied to him: the other was her lover; they lay together on all those heaps of slaty coal, for she had a loose woman's gait. He sulked without reason, as if she had deceived him. She, however, every moment turned round, warned him of obstacles and seemed to invite him to be affectionate. They were so lost here; it would have been so easy to laugh together like good friends! At last they entered the large haulage gallery; it was a relief to the indecision from which he was suffering, while she once more had a saddened look, the regret for a happiness which they would not find again.

Now the subterranean life rumbled around them with a continual passing of captains, the come and go of the trains drawn by trotting horses. Lamps starred the night everywhere. They had to efface themselves against the rock to leave the path free to shadowy men and beasts, whose breath came against their faces. Jeanlin, running barefooted behind his train, cried out some naughtiness to them which they could not hear amid the thunder of the wheels. They still went on, she now silent, he not recognizing the turnings and roads of the morning and fancying that she was leading him deeper and deeper into the earth; and what especially troubled him was the cold, an increasing cold which he had felt on emerging from the cutting and which caused him to shiver the more the nearer they approached the shaft. Between the narrow walls the column of air now blew like a tempest. He despaired of ever coming to the end, when suddenly they found themselves in the pit-eye hall.

Chaval cast a sidelong glance at them, his mouth drawn with suspicion. The others were there, covered with sweat in the icy current, silent like himself, swallowing their grunts of rage. They had arrived too soon and could not be taken to the top for half an hour, more especially since some complicated maneuvers were going on for lowering a horse. The porters were still rolling the trams with the deafening sound of old iron in movement, and the cages were flying up, disappearing in the rain which fell in the black hole. Below, the sump, a cesspool ten meters deep, filled with this streaming water, also exhaled its muddy moisture. Men were constantly moving around the shaft, pulling the signal cords, pressing on the arms of levers, in the midst of this spray in which their garments were soaked. The reddish light of three open lamps cut out great moving shadows and gave to this subterranean hall the air of a villainous cavern, some bandits' forge near a torrent.

Maheu made one last effort. He approached Pierron, who had gone on duty at six o'clock.

"Here! You might as well let us go up."

But the porter, a handsome fellow with strong limbs and a gentle face, refused with a frightened gesture.

"Impossible. Ask the captain. They would fine me."

Fresh growls were stifled. Catherine bent forward and said in Etienne's ear:

"Come and see the stable then. That's a comfortable place!"

And they had to escape without being seen, for it was forbidden to go there. It was on the left, at the end of a short gallery. Twenty-five meters in length and nearly four high, cut in the rock and vaulted with bricks, it could contain twenty horses. It was, in fact, comfortable there. There was a pleasant warmth of living beasts, the good odor of fresh and well-kept litter. The only lamp threw out the calm rays of a night light. There were horses there at rest, who turned their heads, with their large infantine eyes, then went back to their hay without haste, like fat, well-kept workers, loved by everybody.

But as Catherine was reading aloud their names written on zinc plates over the mangers, she uttered a slight cry, seeing something suddenly rise before her. It was Mouquette, who emerged in fright from a pile of straw in which she was sleeping. On Monday, when she was overtired with her Sunday's spree, she gave herself a violent blow on the nose and left her cutting under the pretence of seeking water, to bury herself here with the horses in the warm litter. Her father, being weak with her, allowed it at the risk of getting into trouble.

Just then Mouque, the father, entered, a short, bald, worn-out-looking man but still stout, which is rare in an old miner of fifty. Since he had been made a groom he chewed to such a degree that his gums bled in his black mouth. On seeing the two with his daughter he became angry.

"What are you up to there, all of you? Come, up! The jades, bringing a man here! It's a fine thing to come and do your dirty tricks in my straw."

Mouquette thought it funny and held her sides. But Etienne, feeling awkward, moved away, while Catherine smiled at him. As all three returned to the pit eye, Bébert and Jeanlin arrived there also with a train of tubs. There was a stoppage for the maneuvering of the cages, and the young girl approached their horse, caressed it with her hand and talked about it to her companion. It was Bataille, the *doyen* of the mine, a white horse who had lived below for ten years. These ten years he had lived in this hole, occupying the same corner of the stable, doing the same task along the black galleries, without ever seeing daylight. Very fat, with shining coat and a good-natured air, he seemed to lead the existence of a sage, sheltered from the evils of the world above. In this darkness, too, he had become very cunning. The passage in which he worked had grown so familiar to him that he could open the ventilation doors with his head, and he lowered himself to avoid knocks at the narrow spots. Without doubt, also, he counted his turns, for when he had made the regulation number of journeys he refused to do any more and had to be led back to his manger. Now that old age was coming on his cat's eyes were sometimes dimmed with melancholy. Perhaps he vaguely saw again in the depths of his obscure dreams the mill at which he was born, near Marchiennes, a mill placed on the edge of the Scarpe, surrounded by large fields over which the wind always blew. Something burned in the air—an enormous lamp, the exact appearance of which escaped his beast's memory—and he stood with lowered head, trembling on his old feet, making useless efforts to recall the sun.

Meanwhile the maneuvers went on in the shaft; the signal hammer had struck four blows, and the horse was being lowered; there was always excitement at

such a time, for it sometimes happened that the beast was seized by such terror that it was landed dead. When put into a net at the top it struggled fiercely; then when it felt the ground no longer beneath it it remained as if petrified and disappeared without a quiver of the skin, with enlarged and fixed eyes. This animal being too big to pass between the guides, it had been necessary, when hooking it beneath the cage, to bind back the head and attach it to the flanks. The descent lasted nearly three minutes, the engine being slowed as a precaution. Below the excitement was increasing. What then? Was he going to be left on the road, hanging in the blackness? At last he appeared in his stony immobility, his eye fixed and dilated with terror. It was a bay horse hardly three years of age, called Trompette.

"Attention!" cried Father Mouque, whose duty it was to receive it. "Bring him here; don't undo him yet."

Trompette was soon placed on the metal floor in a mass. Still he did not move: he seemed in a nightmare in this obscure, infinite hole, this deep hall echoing with tumult. They were beginning to unfasten him when Bataille, who had just been unharnessed, approached and stretched out his neck to smell this companion who lay on the earth. The workmen jokingly enlarged the circle. Well, what pleasant odor did he find in him? But Bataille, deaf to mockery, became animated. He probably found in him the good odor of the open air, the forgotten odor of the sun on the grass. And he suddenly broke out into a sonorous neigh, full of musical gladness, in which there seemed to be the emotion of a sob. It was a greeting, the joy of those ancient things of which a gust had reached him, the melancholy of one more prisoner who would not ascend again until death.

"Ah, that animal Bataille!" shouted the workmen, amused at the antics of their favorite. "He's talking with his mate."

Trompette was unbound but still did not move. He remained on his flank, as if he still felt the net straining him, garroted by fear. At last they got him up with a lash of the whip, dazed and his limbs quivering. And Father Mouque led away the two beasts, fraternizing together.

"Here! Is it ready yet?" asked Maheu.

It was necessary to clear the cages, and, besides, it was yet ten minutes before the hour for ascending. Little by little the stalls emptied, and the miners returned from all the galleries. There were already some fifty men there, damp and shivering, their inflamed chests panting on every side. Pierron, in spite of his mawkish face, struck his daughter Lydie because she had left the cutting before time. Zacharie slyly pinched Mouquette with a joke about warming himself. But the discontent increased; Chaval and Levaque narrated the engineer's threat, the tram to be lowered in price and the planking paid separately. And exclamations greeted this scheme; a rebellion was germinating in this little corner, nearly six hundred meters beneath the earth. Soon they could not restrain their voices; these men, soiled by coal and frozen by the delay, accused the company of killing half their workers at the bottom and starving the other half to death. Etienne listened, trembling.

"Quick, quick!" repeated the captain, Richomme, to the porters.

He hastened the preparations for the ascent, not wishing to be hard, pretending not to hear. However, the murmurs became so loud that he was obliged to notice them. They were calling out behind him that this would not last always and that one fine day the whole affair would be smashed up.

"You're sensible," he said to Maheu; "make them hold their tongues. When one hasn't got power one must have sense."

But Maheu, who was getting calm and had at last become anxious, did not need to interfere. Suddenly the voices fell; Négrel and Dansaert, returning from their inspection, entered from a gallery, both of them sweating. The habit of discipline made the men stand in rows while the engineer passed through the group without a word. He got into one tram and the head captain into another; the signal was sounded five times, ringing for the butcher's meat, as they said, for the masters; and the cage flew up in the air in the midst of a gloomy silence.

CHAPTER VI

AS HE ASCENDED in the cage heaped up with four others, Etienne resolved to continue his famished course along the roads. One might as well die at once as go down to the bottom of that hell, where it was not even possible to earn one's bread. Catherine, in the tram above him, was no longer at his side with her pleasant, enervating warmth, and he preferred to avoid foolish thoughts and to go away, for with his wider education he felt nothing of the resignation of this flock; he would end by strangling one of the masters.

Suddenly he was blinded. The ascent had been so rapid that he was stunned by the daylight, and his eyelids quivered in the brightness to which he had already grown unaccustomed. It was, nonetheless, a relief to him to feel the cage settle onto the bars. A lander opened the door, and a flood of workmen leaped out of the trams.

"I say, Mouquet," whispered Zacharie in the lander's ear, "are we off to Volcan tonight?"

The Volcan was a café concert at Montsou. Mouquet winked his left eye with a silent laugh which made his jaws gape. Short and stout like his father, he had the impudent face of a fellow who devours everything without care for the morrow. Just then Mouquette came out in her turn, and he gave her a formidable smack on the flank by way of fraternal tenderness.

Etienne hardly recognized the lofty nave of the receiving hall, which had before looked imposing in the ambiguous light of the lanterns. It was simply bare and dirty; a dull light entered through the dusty windows. The engine alone shone at the end with its copper; the well-greased steel cables moved like ribbons soaked in ink, and the pulleys above, the enormous scaffold which supported them, the cages, the trams, all this prodigality of metal made the hall look somber with their hard gray tones of old iron. Without ceasing the rumbling of the wheels shook the metal floor, while from the coal thus put in motion there arose a fine charcoal powder which powdered black the soil, the walls, even the joists of the steeple.

But Chaval, after glancing at the table of counters in the receiver's little glass office, came back, furious. He had discovered that two of their trams had been rejected, one because it did not contain the regulation amount, the other because the coal was not clean.

"This finishes the day," he cried. "Twenty sous less again! This is because we take on lazy rascals who use their arms as a pig does his tail!"

And his sidelong look at Etienne completed his thought.

The latter was tempted to reply by a blow. Then he asked himself what would be the use since he was going away. This decided him absolutely.

"It's not possible to do it right the first day," said Maheu to restore peace; "you'll do better tomorrow."

They were all none the less soured and disturbed by the need to quarrel. As they passed to the lamp cabin to give up their lamps Levaque began to abuse the lampman, whom he accused of not properly cleaning the lamp. They only slackened down a little in the shed where the fire was still burning. It had even been too heavily piled up, for the stove was red and the vast room, without a window, seemed to be in flames, to such a degree did the reflection make bloody the walls. And there were grunts of joy; all the backs were roasted at a distance till they smoked like soup. When their flanks were burning they cooked their bellies. Mouquette had tranquilly let down her breeches to dry her chemise. Some lads were making fun of her; they burst out laughing because she suddenly showed them her posterior, a gesture which in her was the extreme expression of contempt.

"I'm off," said Chaval, who had shut up his tools in his box.

No one moved. Only Mouquette hastened and went out behind him on the pretext that they were both going back to Montsou. But the others went on joking; they knew that he would have no more to do with her.

Catherine, however, who seemed preoccupied, was speaking in a low voice to her father. The latter was surprised; then he agreed with a nod and, calling Etienne to give him back his bundle:

"Listen," he said, "you haven't a sou; you will have time to starve before the fortnight's out. Shall I try and get you credit somewhere?"

The young man stood for a moment, confused. He had been just about to claim his thirty sous and go. But shame restrained him before the young girl. She looked at him fixedly; perhaps she would think he was shirking the work.

"You know I can promise you nothing," Maheu went on. "They can but refuse us."

Then Etienne consented. They would refuse. Besides, it would bind him to nothing; he could still go away after having eaten something. Then he was dissatisfied at not having refused, seeing Catherine's joy, a pretty laugh, a look of friendship, happy at having been useful to him. What was the good of it all?

When they had put on their sabots and shut their boxes the Maheus left the shed, following their comrades, who were leaving one by one after they had warmed themselves. Etienne went behind. Levaque and his urchin joined the band. But as they crossed the screening place a scene of violence stopped them.

It was in a vast shed, with beams blackened by the powder, and large shutters, through which blew a constant current of air. The coal trams arrived straight from the receiving room and were then overturned by the tipping cradles onto hoppers, long iron slides; and to right and to left of these the screeners, mounted on steps and armed with shovels and rakes, swept together the clean coal which afterward fell through funnels into the railway wagons beneath the shed.

Philomène Levaque was there, thin and pale, with the sheeplike face of a girl who spat blood. With head protected by a fragment of blue wool and hands and arms black to the elbows, she was screening beneath an old witch, the mother of Pierronne, the Brûlé, as she was called, with terrible owl's eyes and a mouth drawn in like a miser's purse. They were abusing each other, the young one accusing the elder of raking her stones so that she could not get a basketful in ten minutes. They were paid by the basket, and these quarrels were constantly arising. Hair was flying, and hands were making black marks on red faces.

"Give it her bloody well!" cried Zacharie from above to his mistress.

All the screeners laughed. But the Brûlé turned snappishly on the young man.

"Now then, dirty beast! You'd do better to own the two kids you have filled her with. Fancy that, a slip of eighteen, who can't stand straight!"

Maheu had to prevent his son from descending to see, as he said, the color of this carcass's skin.

A foreman came up, and the rakes again began to move the coal. One could only see all along the hoppers the round backs of women eagerly disputing the stones.

Outside the wind had suddenly quieted; a moist cold was falling from a gray sky. The colliers thrust out their shoulders, crossed their arms and set forth irregularly with a rolling gait which made their large bones stand out beneath their thin garments. In the daylight they looked like a band of Negroes thrown into the mud. Some of them had not finished their bricks, and the remains of the bread carried between the shirt and the jacket made them humpbacked.

"Hullo! There's Bouteloup," said Zacharie, grinning.

Levaque without stopping exchanged two sentences with his lodger, a big brown fellow of thirty-five with a placid, honest air:

"Is the soup ready, Louis?"

"I believe it is."

"Then the wife is good-humored today."

"Yes, I believe she is."

Other miners bound for the earth cutting came up, new bands which one by one were engulfed in the pit. It was the three o'clock descent, more men for the pit to devour, the gangs who would replace the sets of the pikemen at the bottom of the passages. The mine never rested; day and night human insects were digging out the rock six hundred meters below the beetroot fields.

However, the youngsters went ahead. Jeanlin confided to Bébert a com-

plicated plan for getting four sous' worth of tobacco on credit, while Lydie followed respectfully at a distance. Catherine came with Zacharie and Etienne. None of them spoke. And it was only in front of the Avantage Inn that Maheu and Levaque rejoined them.

"Here we are," said the former to Etienne. "Will you come in?"

They separated. Catherine had stood a moment motionless, gazing once more at the young man with her large eyes full of greenish limpidity, like spring water, the crystal deepened the more by her black face. She smiled and disappeared with the others on the road that led up to the settlement.

The inn was situated between the village and the mine, at the crossing of two roads. It was a two-storied brick house, whitewashed from top to bottom, enlivened around the windows by a broad pale blue border. On a square sign-board nailed above the door one read in yellow letters: *A l'Avantage, licensed by Rasseneur*. Behind stretched a skittle ground enclosed by a hedge. The company, who had done everything to buy up the property placed within its vast territory, was in despair over this inn in the open fields, at the very entrance of the Voreux.

"Go in," said Meheu to Etienne.

The little parlor was quite bare with its white walls, its three tables and its dozen chairs, its deal counter about the size of a kitchen dresser. There were a dozen glasses at most, three bottles of liqueur, a decanter, a little zinc box with a pewter tap to hold the beer and nothing else—not a figure, not a little table, not a game. In the metal fireplace, which was bright and polished, a coal fire was burning quietly. On the flags a thin layer of white sand drank up the constant moisture of this water-soaked land.

"A glass," ordered Meheu of a big, fair girl, a neighbor's daughter who sometimes took charge of the place. "Is Rasseneur in?"

The girl turned the tap, replying that the master would soon return. In a long, slow gulp the miner emptied half his glass to sweep away the dust which filled his throat. He offered nothing to his companion. One other customer, a damp and besmeared miner, was seated before the table, drinking his beer in silence with an air of deep meditation. A third entered, was served in response to a gesture, paid and went away without uttering a word.

But a stout man of thirty-eight, with a round shaven face and a good-natured smile, now appeared. It was Rasseneur, a former pikeman whom the company had dismissed three years ago after a strike. A very good workman, he could speak well, put himself at the head of every opposition and had at last become the chief of the discontented. His wife already held a license, like many miners' wives, and when he was thrown onto the street he became an innkeeper himself; having found the money, he placed his inn in front of the Voreux as a provocation to the company. Now his house had prospered; it had become a center, and he was enriched by the animosity which he had gradually fostered in the hearts of his old comrades.

"This is a lad I hired this morning," said Maheu at once. "Have you got one of your two rooms free, and will you give him credit for a fortnight?"

Rasseneur's broad face suddenly expressed great suspicion. He examined

Etienne with a glance and replied without giving himself the trouble to express any regret:

"My two rooms are taken. Can't do it."

The young man expected this refusal, but it hurt him, nevertheless, and he was surprised at the sudden grief he experienced in going. No matter; he would go when he had received his thirty sous. The miner who was drinking at a table had left. Others, one by one, continued to come in to clear their throats, then went on their road with the same slouching gait. It was a simple washing without joy or passion, the silent satisfaction of a need.

"Then there's no news?" Rasseneur asked in a peculiar tone of Maheu, who was finishing his beer in small gulps.

The latter turned his head and saw that only Etienne was near.

"There's been more squabbling. Yes, about the timbering."

He told the story. The innkeeper's face reddened, swelling with emotion, which flamed in his skin and eyes. At last he broke out:

"Well, well! If they decide to lower the price they are done for."

Etienne constrained him. However, he went on, throwing sidelong glances in his direction. And there were reticences and implications; he was talking of the manager, M. Hennebeau, of his wife, of his nephew, the little Négrel, without naming them, repeating that this could not go on, that things were bound to smash up one of these fine days. The misery was too great, and he spoke of the workshops that were closing, the workers who were going away. During the last month he had given more than six pounds of bread a day. He had heard the day before that M. Deneulin, the owner of a neighboring pit, could scarcely keep going. He had also received a letter from Lille full of disturbing details.

"You know," he whispered, "it comes from that person you saw here one evening."

But he was interrupted. His wife entered in her turn, a tall woman, lean and keen, with a long nose and violet cheeks. She was a much more radical politician than her husband.

"Pluchart's letter," she said. "Ah, if that fellow was master things would soon go better."

Etienne had been listening for a moment; he understood and became excited over these ideas of misery and revenge. This name, suddenly uttered, caused him to start. He said aloud, as if in spite of himself:

"I know him—Pluchart."

They looked at him. He had to add:

"Yes, I am an engineman; he was my foreman at Lille. A capable man. I have often talked with him."

Rasseneur examined him afresh, and there was a rapid change on his face, a sudden sympathy. At last he said to his wife:

"It's Maheu who brings me this gentleman, one of his putters, to see if there is a room for him upstairs and if we can give him credit for a fortnight."

Then the matter was settled in four words. There was a room; the lodger had left that morning. And the innkeeper, who was very excited, talked more

freely, repeating that he only asked possibilities from the masters without demanding, like so many others, things that were too hard to get. His wife shrugged her shoulders and demanded justice absolutely.

"Good evening," interrupted Maheu. "All that won't prevent men from going down, and as long as they go there will be people working themselves to death. Look how fresh you are these three years that you've been out of it."

"Yes, I'm very much better," declared Rasseneur complacently.

Etienne went as far as the door, thanking the miner, who was leaving, but the latter nodded his head without adding a word, and the young man watched him painfully climb up the road to the settlement. Mme Rasseneur, occupied with serving customers, asked him to wait a minute, when she would show him his room, where he could clean himself. Should he remain? He again felt hesitation, a discomfort which made him regret the freedom of the open highroad, the hunger beneath the sun, endured with the joy of being one's own master. It seemed to him that he had lived years since his arrival on the pit bank, in the midst of squalls, to those hours passed under the earth on his belly in the black passages. And he shrank from beginning again; it was unjust and too hard. His man's pride revolted at the idea of becoming a crushed and blinded beast.

While Etienne was thus debating with himself his eyes, wandering over the immense plain, gradually began to see it clearly. He was surprised; he had not imagined the horizon was like this when old Bonnemort had pointed it out to him in the darkness. Before him he plainly saw the Voreux in a fold of the earth, with its wood and brick buildings, the tarred screening shed, the slate-covered steeple, the engine room and the tall, pale red chimney, all massed together with that evil air. But around these buildings the space extended, and he had not imagined it so large, changed into an inky sea by the ascending waves of coal soot, bristling with high buttresses which carried the rails of the footbridges, encumbered in one corner with the timber supply, which looked like the harvest of a mown forest. Toward the right the pit bank hid the view, colossal as a barricade of giants, already covered with grass in its older part, consumed at the other end by an interior fire which had been burning for a year with a thick smoke, leaving at the surface in the midst of the pale gray of the slates and sandstones long trails of bleeding rust. Then the fields unrolled, the endless fields of wheat and beetroot, naked at this season of the year, marshes with scanty vegetation cut by a few stunted willows, distant meadows separated by slender rows of poplars. Very far away little pale patches indicated towns, Marchiennes to the north, Montsou to the south, while the forest of Vandame to the east bordered the horizon with the violet line of its leafless trees. And beneath the livid sky, in the faint daylight of this winter afternoon, it seemed as if all the blackness of the Voreux and all its flying coal dust had fallen upon the plain, powdering the trees, sanding the roads, sowing the earth.

Etienne looked, and what especially surprised him was a canal, the canalized stream of the Scarpe, which he had not seen in the night. From the Voreux to Marchiennes this canal ran straight, like a dull silver ribbon two leagues long,

an avenue lined by large trees raised above the low earth, threading into space with the perspective of its green banks, its pale water into which glided the vermillion of the boats. Near one pit there was a wharf with moored vessels which were laden directly from the trams at the footbridges. Afterward the canal made a curve, sloping by the marshes, and the whole soul of that smooth plain appeared to lie in this geometrical stream which traversed it like a great road, carting coal and iron.

Etienne's glance went up from the canal to the settlement built on the height, of which he could only distinguish the red tiles. Then his eyes rested again at the bottom of the clay slope, toward the Voreux, on two enormous masses of bricks made and burned on the spot. A branch of the company's railroad passed behind a paling for the use of the pit. They must be sending down the last miners to the earth cutting. Only one shrill note came from a truck pushed by men. One felt no longer the unknown darkness, the inexplicable thunder, the flaming of mysterious stars. Afar the blast furnaces and the coke kilns had paled with the dawn. There only remained, unceasingly, the escapement of the pump, always breathing with the same thick, long breath, the ogre's breath, of which he could now see the gray steam and which nothing could satiate.

Then Etienne suddenly made up his mind. Perhaps he seemed to see again Catherine's clear eyes up there at the entrance to the settlement. Perhaps, rather, it was the wind of revolt which came from the Voreux. He did not know, but he wished to go down again to the mine, to suffer and to fight. And he thought fiercely of those people Bonnemort had talked of, the crouching and sated god to whom ten thousand starving men gave their flesh without knowing it.

PART TWO

CHAPTER I

THE GRÉGOIRES' PROPERTY, Piolaine, was situated two kilometers to the east of Montsou, on the Joiselle road. The house was a large square building without style, dating from the beginning of the last century. Of all the land that once belonged to it, there only remained some thirty hectares, enclosed by walls and easy to keep up. The orchard and kitchen garden especially were everywhere spoken of, being famous for the finest fruit and vegetables in the country. For the rest, there was no park, only a small wood. The avenue of old limes, a vault of foliage three hundred meters long, reaching from the gate to the porch, was one of the curiosities of this bare plain, on which one could count the large trees between Marchiennes and Beaugnies.

On that morning the Grégoires got up at eight o'clock. Usually they never stirred until an hour later, being heavy sleepers, but last night's tempest had

disturbed them. And while her husband had gone at once to see if the wind had made any havoc, Mme Grégoire went down to the kitchen in her slippers and flannel dressing gown. She was short and stout, about fifty-eight years of age, and retained a broad, surprised, dollish face beneath the dazzling whiteness of her hair.

"Mélanie," she said to the cook, "suppose you were to make the brioche this morning, since the dough is ready. Mademoiselle will not get up for half an hour yet, and she can eat it with her chocolate. Eh? It will be a surprise."

The cook, a lean old woman who had served them for thirty years, laughed.

"That's true! It will be a famous surprise. My stove is alight, and the oven must be hot, and then Honorine can help me a bit."

Honorine, a girl of some twenty years who had been taken in as a child and brought up in the house, now acted as housemaid. Besides these two women, the only other servant was the coachman Francis, who undertook the heavy work. A gardener and his wife were occupied with the vegetables, the fruit, the flowers and the poultry yard. And as service here was patriarchal, this little world lived together like one large family, on very good terms.

Mme Grégoire, who had planned this surprise of the brioche in bed, waited to see the dough put in the oven. The kitchen was very large, and one guessed it was the most important room in the house by its extreme cleanliness and by the arsenal of saucepans, utensils and pots which filled it. Provisions abounded, hanging from hooks or in cupboards.

"And let it be well gilt, won't you?" Mme Grégoire said as she passed into the dining room.

In spite of the hot-air stove which warmed the whole house, a coal fire enlivened this room. In other respects it exhibited no luxury: a large table, chairs, a mahogany sideboard; only two deep easy chairs betrayed a love of comfort, long, happy hours of digestion. They never went into the drawing room; they remained here in a family circle.

Just then M. Grégoire came back dressed in a thick fustian jacket; he, also, was ruddy for his sixty years, with large, good-natured, honest features beneath the snow of his curly hair. He had seen the coachman and the gardener; there had been no damage of importance, nothing but a fallen chimney pot. Every morning he liked to give a glance round Piolaine, which was not large enough to cause him anxiety and from which he derived all the happiness of ownership.

"And Cécile?" he asked. "Isn't she up yet then?"

"I can't make it out," replied his wife. "I thought I heard her moving."

The table was set; there were three cups on the white cloth. They sent Honorine to see what had become of Mademoiselle. But she came back immediately, restraining her laughter, stifling her voice, as if she had been talking aloud in the room above.

"Oh, if Monsieur and Madame could see Mademoiselle! She sleeps; oh, she sleeps like an angel. One can't imagine it! It's a pleasure to look at her."

The father and mother exchanged tender looks. He said, smiling:

"Will you come and see?"

"The poor little darling!" she murmured. "I'll come."

And they went up together. The room was the only luxurious one in the house. It was draped in blue silk, and the furniture was lacquered white, with blue tracery—a spoiled child's whim, which her parents had gratified. In the vague whiteness of the bed, beneath the half-light which came through a curtain that was drawn back, the young girl was sleeping with her cheek resting on her naked arm. She was not pretty, too healthy, in too vigorous condition, fully developed at eighteen; but she had superb flesh, the freshness of milk, with her chestnut hair, her round face and little willful nose lost between her cheeks. The coverlet had slipped down, and she was breathing so softly that her respiration did not even lift her bosom.

"That horrible wind must have prevented her from closing her eyes," said the mother softly.

The father imposed silence with a gesture. Both of them leaned down and gazed with adoration on this girl in her virgin nakedness, whom they had desired so long and who had come so late, when they had no longer hoped for her. They found her perfect, not at all too fat, and could never feed her sufficiently. And she went on sleeping without feeling them near her, with their faces against hers. However, a slight movement disturbed her motionless face. They feared that they would wake her and went out on tiptoe.

"Hush!" said M. Grégoire at the door. "If she has not slept we must leave her sleeping."

"As long as she likes, the darling!" agreed Mme Grégoire. "We will wait."

They went down and seated themselves in the easy chairs in the dining room, while the servants, laughing at Mademoiselle's sound sleep, kept the chocolate on the stove without grumbling. He took up a newspaper; she knit at a large woolen quilt. It was very hot, and not a sound was heard in the silent house.

The Grégoires' fortune, about forty thousand francs a year, was entirely invested in a share of the Montsou mines. They would complacently narrate its origin, which dated from the very formation of the company.

Toward the beginning of the last century there had been a mad search for coal between Lille and Valenciennes. The success of those who held the concession, which was afterward to become the Anzin Company, had turned all heads. In every commune the ground was tested, and societies were formed and concessions grew up in a night. But among all the obstinate seekers of that epoch, Baron Desrumaux had certainly left the reputation for the most heroic intelligence. For forty years he had struggled without yielding in the midst of continual obstacles: early searches unsuccessful, new pits abandoned at the end of long months of work, landslips which filled up borings, sudden inundations which drowned the workmen, hundreds of thousands of francs thrown into the earth; then the squabbles of the management, the panics of the shareholders, the struggle with the lords of the soil, who were resolved not to recognize royal concessions if no treaty was first made with themselves. He had at last founded the association of Desrumaux, Fauquenoix and Company to exploit the Montsou concession, and the pits began to yield a small

profit when two neighboring concessions, that of Cougny, belonging to the Comte de Cougny, and that of Joiselle, belonging to the Cornille and Jenard Company, had nearly overwhelmed him beneath the terrible assault of their competition. Happily on the twenty-fifth August 1760 a treaty was made between the three concessions, uniting them into a single one. The Montsou Mining Company was created, such as it still exists today. In the distribution they had divided the total property, according to the standard of the money of the time, into twenty-four sous, of which each was subdivided into twelve deniers, which made two hundred and eighty-eight deniers; and as the denier was worth ten thousand francs, the capital represented a sum of nearly three millions. Desrumaux, dying but triumphant, received in this division six sous and three deniers.

In those days the baron possessed Piolaine, which had three hundred hectares belonging to it, and he had in his service as steward Honoré Grégoire, a Picardy lad, the great-grandfather of Léon Grégoire, Cécile's father. When the Montsou treaty was made Honoré, who had laid up savings to the amount of some fifty thousand francs, yielded tremblingly to his master's unshakable faith. He gave up ten thousand francs in fine crowns and took a denier, though with the fear of robbing his children of that sum. His son Eugène, in fact, received very small dividends; and as he had become a bourgeois and had been foolish enough to throw away the other forty thousand francs of the paternal inheritance in a company that came to grief, he lived meanly enough. But the interest of the denier gradually increased. The fortune began with Félicien, who was able to realize a dream with which his grandfather, the old steward, had nursed his childhood—the purchase of dismembered Piolaine, which he acquired as national property for a ludicrous sum. However, bad years followed. It was necessary to await the conclusion of the revolutionary catastrophes and afterward Napoleon's bloody fall, and it was Léon Grégoire who profited at a stupefying rate of progress by the timid and uneasy investment of his great-grandfather. Those poor ten thousand francs grew and multiplied with the company's prosperity. Since 1820 they had brought in cent per cent, ten thousand francs. In 1844 they had produced twenty thousand; in 1850, forty. During two years the dividend had reached the prodigious figure of fifty thousand francs; the value of the denier, quoted at the Lille bourse at a million, had centupled in a century.

M. Grégoire, who had been advised to sell out when this figure of a million was reached, had refused with his smiling, paternal air. Six months later an industrial crisis broke out; the denier fell to six hundred thousand francs. But he still smiled; he regretted nothing, for the Grégoires had maintained an obstinate faith in their mine. It would rise again; God Himself was not so solid. Then with his religious faith was mixed profound gratitude toward an investment which for a century had supported the family in doing nothing. It was like a divinity of their own whom their egoism surrounded with a kind of worship, the benefactor of the hearth, lulling them in their great bed of idleness, fattening them at their gluttonous table. From father to son it had gone on. Why risk displeasing fate by doubting it? And at the bottom of

their fidelity there was a superstitious terror, a fear lest the million of deniers might suddenly melt away if they were to realize it and to put it in a drawer. It seemed to them more sheltered in the earth, from which a race of miners, generations of starving people, extracted it for them, a little every day, as they needed it.

For the rest, happiness rained on this house. M. Grégoire, when very young, had married the daughter of a Marchiennes druggist, a plain, penniless girl whom he adored and who repaid him with happiness. She shut herself up in her household and worshiped her husband, having no other will but his. No difference of tastes separated them; their desires were mingled in one idea of comfort, and they had thus lived for forty years, in affection and little mutual services. It was a well-regulated existence; the forty thousand francs were spent quietly, and the savings expended on Cécile, whose tardy birth had for a moment disturbed the budget. They still satisfied all her whims—a second horse, two more carriages, toilets sent from Paris. But they tasted in this one more joy; they thought nothing too good for their daughter, although they had such a horror of display that they had preserved the fashions of their youth. Every unprofitable expense seemed foolish to them.

Suddenly the door opened and a loud voice called out:

"Hullo! What now? Having breakfast without me!"

It was Cécile, just come from her bed, her eyes heavy with sleep. She had simply put up her hair and flung on a white woolen dressing gown.

"No, no!" said the mother. "You see we are all waiting. Eh? Has the wind prevented you from sleeping, poor darling?"

The young girl looked at her in great surprise.

"Has it been windy? I didn't know anything about it. I haven't moved all night."

Then they thought this funny, and all three began to laugh; the servants who were bringing in the breakfast also broke out laughing, so amused was the household at the idea that Mademoiselle had been sleeping for twelve hours right off. The sight of the brioche completed the expansion of their faces.

"What! Is it cooked then?" said Cécile. "That must be a surprise for me! That'll be good now, hot, with the chocolate!"

They sat down to table at last with the smoking chocolate in their cups and for a long time talked of nothing but the brioche. Mélanie and Honorine remained to give details about the cooking and watched them stuffing themselves with greasy lips, saying that it was a pleasure to make a cake when one saw the masters enjoying it so much.

But the dogs began to bark loudly; perhaps they announced the music mistress, who came from Marchiennes on Mondays and Fridays. A professor of literature also came. All the young girl's education was thus carried on at Piolaine in happy ignorance with her childish whims, throwing the book out of the window as soon as anything wearied her.

"It is Monsieur Deneulin," said Honorine, returning.

Behind her Deneulin, a cousin of M. Grégoire's, appeared without ceremony; with his loud voice, his quick gestures, he had the appearance of an

old cavalry officer. Although over fifty, his short hair and thick mustache were as black as ink.

"Yes! It is I. Good day! Don't disturb yourselves."

He had sat down amid the family's exclamations. They turned at last to their chocolate.

"Have you anything to tell me?" asked M. Grégoire.

"No! Nothing at all," Deneulin hastened to reply. "I came out on horseback to rub off the rust a bit, and as I passed your door I thought I would just look in."

Cécile questioned him about Jeanne and Lucie, his daughters. They were perfectly well; the first was always at her painting, while the other, the elder, was training her voice at the piano from morning till night. And there was a slight quiver in his voice, a disquiet which he concealed beneath bursts of gaiety.

M. Grégoire began again:

"And everything goes well at the pit?"

"Well, I am upset over this dirty crisis. Ah, we are paying for the prosperous years! They have built too many workshops, put down too many railways, invested too much capital with a view to a large return, and today the money is asleep. They can't get any more to make the whole thing work. Luckily things are not desperate; I shall get out of it somehow."

Like his cousin, he had inherited a denier in the Montsou mines. But being an enterprising engineer, tormented by the desire for a royal fortune, he had hastened to sell out when the denier had reached a million. For some months he had been maturing a scheme. His wife possessed, through an uncle, the little concession of Vandame, where only two pits were open—Jean-Bart and Gaston-Marie—but in an abandoned state and with such defective material that the output hardly covered the cost. Now he was meditating the repair of Jean-Bart, the renewal of the engine and the enlargement of the shaft so as to facilitate the descent, keeping Gaston-Marie only for exhaustion purposes. They ought to be able to shovel up gold there, he said. The idea was sound. Only the million had been spent over it, and this damnable industrial crisis broke out at the moment when large profits would have shown that he was right. Besides, he was a bad manager, with a rough kindness toward his workmen, and since his wife's death he allowed himself to be pillaged and also gave the rein to his daughters, the elder of whom talked of going on the stage, while the younger had already had three landscapes refused at the Salon, both of them joyous amid the downfall and exhibiting in poverty their capacity for good household management.

"You see, Léon," he went on in a hesitating voice, "you were wrong not to sell out at the same time as I did; now everything is going down. You run risk, and if you had confided your money to me you would see what we should have done at Vandame in our mine!"

M. Grégoire finished his chocolate without haste. He replied peacefully:

"Never! You know that I don't want to speculate. I live quietly, and it would be too foolish to worry my head over business affairs. And as for

Montsou, it may continue to go down; we shall always get our living out of it. It doesn't do to be so diabolically greedy! Then, listen, it is you who will bite your fingers one day, for Montsou will rise again, and Cécile's grandchildren will still get their white bread out of it."

Deneulin listened with a constrained smile.

"Then," he murmured, "if I were to ask you to put a hundred thousand francs in my affair you would refuse?"

But seeing the Grégoires' disturbed faces, he regretted having gone so far; he put off his idea of a loan, reserving it until the case was desperate.

"Oh, I have not got there! It is a joke. Good heavens! Perhaps you are right; the money that other people earn for you is the best to fatten on."

They changed the conversation. Cécile spoke again of her cousins, whose tastes interested, while at the same time they shocked, her. Mme Grégoire promised to take her daughter to see those dear little ones on the first fine day. M. Grégoire, however, with a distracted air, did not follow the conversation. He added aloud:

"If I were in your place I wouldn't persist any more; I would treat with Montsou. They want to, and you will get your money back."

He alluded to an old hatred which existed between the concession of Montsou and that of Vandame. In spite of the latter's slight importance, its powerful neighbor was enraged at seeing, enclosed within its own sixty-seven communes, this square league which did not belong to it and, after having vainly tried to kill it, had plotted to buy it at a low price when in a failing condition. The war continued without truce. Each party stopped its galleries at two hundred meters from the other; it was a duel to the last drop of blood, although the managers and engineers maintained polite relations with each other.

Deneulin's eyes had flamed up.

"Never!" he cried, in his turn. "Montsou shall never have Vandame as long as I am alive. I dined on Thursday at Hennebeau's, and I saw him fluttering around me. Last autumn, when the big men came to the administration building, they made me all sorts of advances. Yes, yes, I know them—those marquises and dukes and generals and ministers! Brigands who would take away even your shirt at the corner of a wood."

He could not cease. Besides, M. Grégoire did not defend the administration of Montsou—the six stewards established by the treaty of 1760, who governed the company despotically, and the five survivors of whom on every death chose the new member among the powerful and rich shareholders. The opinion of the owner of Piolaine, with his reasonable ideas, was that these gentlemen were sometimes rather immoderate in their exaggerated love of money.

Mélanie had come to clear away the table. Outside the dogs were again barking, and Honorine was going to the door when Cécile, who was stifled by heat and food, left the table.

"No, never mind! It must be for my lesson."

Deneulin had also risen. He watched the young girl go out and asked, smiling:

"Well, and the marriage with little Négrel?"

"Nothing has been settled," said Mme Grégoire; "it is only an idea. We must reflect."

"No doubt!" he went on with a gay laugh. "I believe that the nephew and the aunt— What baffles me is that Madame Hennebeau should throw herself so on Cécile's neck."

But M. Grégoire was indignant. So distinguished a lady, and fourteen years older than the young man! It was monstrous; he did not like joking on such subjects. Deneulin, still laughing, shook hands with him and left.

"Not yet," said Cécile, coming back. "It is that woman with the two children. You know, Mamma, the miner's wife whom we met. Are they to come in here?"

They hesitated. Were they very dirty? No, not very, and they would leave their sabots in the porch. Already the father and mother had stretched themselves out in the depths of their large easy chairs. They were digesting there: The fear of change of air decided them.

"Let them come in, Honorine."

Then Maheude and her little ones entered, frozen and hungry, seized by fright on finding themselves in this room, which was so warm and smelled so nicely of the brioche.

CHAPTER II

THE ROOM remained shut up, and the shutters had allowed gradual streaks of daylight to form a fan on the ceiling. The confined air stupefied them so that they continued their night's slumber: Lénore and Henri in each other's arms, Alzire with her head back, lying on her hump, while Father Bonnemort, having the bed of Zacharie and Jeanlin to himself, snored with open mouth. No sound came from the closet where Maheude had gone to sleep again while suckling Estelle, her breast hanging to one side, the child lying across her belly, overcome, also, and stifling in the soft flesh of the bosom.

The clock below struck six. Along the front of the settlement one heard the sound of doors, then the clatter of sabots along the pavements; the screening women were going to the pit. And silence again fell until seven o'clock. Then the shutters were drawn back; yawns and coughs were heard through the walls. For a long time a coffee mill scraped, but no one awoke in the room.

Suddenly a sound of blows and shouts, far away, made Alzire sit up. She was conscious of the time and ran barefooted to shake her mother.

"Mother, Mother, it is late! You have to go out. Take care, you are crushing Estelle."

And she saved the child, half stifled beneath the enormous mass of the breasts.

"Good gracious!" stammered Maheude, rubbing her eyes. "I'm so knocked up I could sleep all day. Dress Lénore and Henri; I'll take them with me, and

you can take care of Estelle. I don't want to drag her along for fear of hurting her, this dog's weather."

She hastily washed herself and put on an old blue skirt, her cleanest, and another garment of gray wool in which she had made two patches the evening before.

"And the soup! Good gracious!" she muttered again.

When her mother had gone down, hustling everything, Alzire went back into the room, taking with her Estelle, who had begun screaming. But she was used to the little one's rages; at eight she had all a woman's tender cunning in soothing and amusing her. She gently placed her in her still-warm bed and put her to sleep again, giving her a finger to suck. It was time, for now another disturbance broke out, and she had to make peace between Lénore and Henri, who at last awoke. These children could never get on together; it was only when they were asleep that they put their arms round one another's necks. The girl, who was six years old, as soon as she was awake, set on the boy, her elder by two years, who received her blows without returning them. Both of them had the same kind of head, which was too large for them, as if blown out, with disorderly yellow hair. Alzire had to pull her sister by the legs, threatening to take the skin off her bottom. Then there was stamping over the washing and over every garment that she put onto them. The shutters remained closed so as not to disturb Father Bonnemort's sleep. He went on snoring amid the children's frightful clatter.

"It's ready. Are you coming, up there?" shouted Maheude.

She had put back the blinds and stirred up the fire, adding some coal to it. Her hope was that the old man had not swallowed all the soup. But she found the saucepan dry and cooked a handful of vermicelli, which she had been keeping for three days in reserve. They would swallow it with water, without butter, as there could not be any remaining from the day before, and she was surprised to find that Catherine in preparing the bricks had performed the miracle of leaving a piece as large as a nut. But this time the cupboard was indeed empty: nothing, not a crust, not an odd fragment, not a bone to gnaw. What was to become of them if Maigrat persisted in cutting short their credit and if the Piolaine people would not give them the five francs? When the men and the girl returned from the pit they would want to eat, for unfortunately it had not yet been found out how to live without eating.

"Come down, will you?" she cried out, getting angry. "I ought to be gone by this!"

When Alzire and the children were there she divided the vermicelli in three small portions. She herself was not hungry, she said. Although Catherine had already poured water on the coffee dregs of the day before, she did so over again and swallowed two large glasses of coffee, so clear that it looked like rusty water. That would keep her up, all the same.

"Listen!" she repeated to Alzire. "You must let your grandfather sleep; you must watch that Estelle does not knock her head, and if she wakes or if she howls too much, here, take this bit of sugar and melt it and give it her in spoonfuls. I know that you are sensible and won't eat it yourself."

"And school, Mother?"

"School! Well, that must be left for another day. I want you."

"And the soup? Would you like me to make it if you come back late?"

"Soup, soup; no, wait till I come."

Alzire, with the precocious intelligence of a little invalid girl, could make soup very well. She must have understood, for she did not insist. Now the whole settlement was awake; bands of children were going to school, and one heard the trailing noise of their clogs. Eight o'clock struck, and a growing murmur of chatter arose on the left among the Levaque people. The women were commencing their day around the coffeepots, with their fists on their hips, their tongues turning without ceasing, like millstones. A faded head with thick lips and flattened nose was pressed against a windowpane, calling out:

"Anything new? Stop a bit."

"No, no! Later on," replied Maheude. "I have to go out."

And for fear of giving way to the offer of a glass of warm coffee she pushed Lénore and Henri and set out with them. Up above Father Bonnemort was still snoring with a rhythmic snore which rocked the house.

Outside Maheude was surprised to find that the wind was no longer blowing. There had been a sudden thaw; the sky was earth colored; the walls were sticky with greenish moisture, and the roads were covered with pitchlike mud, a special kind of mud peculiar to the coal country, as black as diluted soot, thick and tenacious enough to pull off her sabots. Suddenly she boxed Lénore's ears because the little one amused herself by piling the mud on her clogs as on the end of a shovel. On leaving the settlement she had gone along by the pit bank and followed the road of the canal, making a short cut through broken-up paths, across rough country shut in by mossy palings. Sheds succeeded one another, long workshop buildings, tall chimneys spitting out soot and soiling this ravaged suburb of an industrial district. Behind a clump of poplars the old Réquillart pit exhibited its crumbling steeple, of which the large skeleton alone stood upright. And turning to the right, Maheude found herself on the highroad.

"Stop, stop, dirty pig! I'll teach you to make mincemeat."

Now it was Henri, who had taken a handful of mud and was molding it. The two children had their ears impartially boxed and were brought into good order, looking out of the corners of their eyes at the mud pies they had made. They dragged along, already exhausted by their efforts to unstick their shoes at every step.

On the Marchiennes side the road unrolled its two leagues of pavement, which stretched straight as a ribbon soaked in cart grease between the reddish fields. But on the other side it went down like a braid through Montsou, which was built on the slope of a large undulation in the plain. These roads in the *nord*, drawn like a string between manufacturing towns gradually built up, with their slight curves, their slow ascent, tended to make the department one laborious city. The little brick houses daubed over to enliven the climate, some yellow, others blue, others black—the latter, no doubt, in order to reach at once their final shade—went serpentine down to right and to left to the

bottom of the slope. A few large two-storied villas, the dwellings of the heads of the workshops, made holes in the serried line of straight façades. A church, also of brick, looked like a new model of a large furnace, with its square tower already stained by the floating coal dust. And amid the sugarworks, the ropeworks and the flour mills there stood out ballrooms, restaurants and beershops, which were so numerous that to every thousand houses there were more than five hundred inns.

As she approached the company's yards, a vast series of storehouses and workshops, Maheude decided to take Henri and Lénore by the hand, one on the right, the other on the left. Beyond was situated the house of the director, M. Hennebeau, a sort of vast chalet, separated from the road by a grating and then a garden in which some lean trees vegetated. Just then a carriage had stopped before the door and a gentleman with decorations and a lady in a fur cloak alighted: visitors just arrived from Paris at the Marchiennes station, for Mme Hennebeau, who appeared in the shadow of the porch, was uttering exclamations of surprise and joy.

"Come along then, dawdlers!" growled Maheude, pulling the two little ones, who were standing in the mud.

When she arrived at Maigrat's she was quite excited. Maigrat lived close to the manager; only a wall separated the latter's grounds from his own small house, and he had there a warehouse, a long building which opened onto the road as a shop without a front. He kept everything there, grocery, pork, fruit, and sold bread, beer and saucepans. Formerly an overseer at the Voreux, he had started with a small canteen; then, thanks to the protection of his superiors, his business had enlarged, gradually killing the Montsou retail trade. He centralized merchandise, and the considerable custom of the settlements enabled him to sell more cheaply and to give longer credit. Besides, he had remained in the company's hands, and they had built his small house and his shop.

"Here I am again, Monsieur Maigrat," said Maheude in her humble way, finding him standing in front of his door.

He looked at her without replying. He was a stout, cold, polite man, and he prided himself on never changing his mind.

"Now you won't send me away again, like yesterday. We must have bread from now to Saturday. Sure enough, we owe you sixty francs these two years."

She explained in short, painful phrases. It was an old debt contracted during the last strike. Twenty times over they had promised to settle it, but they had not been able; they could not even give him forty sous a fortnight. And then a misfortune had happened two days before: she had been obliged to pay twenty francs to a shoemaker who threatened to seize their things. And that was why they were without a sou. Otherwise they would have been able to go on until Saturday, like the others.

Maigrat, with protruded belly and folded arms, shook his head at every supplication.

"Only two loaves, Monsieur Maigrat. I am reasonable; I don't ask for coffee. Only two three-pound loaves a day."

"No," he shouted at last at the top of his voice.

His wife had appeared, a pitiful creature who passed all her days over a ledger without even daring to lift her head. She moved away, frightened at seeing this unfortunate woman turning her ardent, beseeching eyes toward her. It was said that she yielded the conjugal bed to the putters among the customers. It was a known fact that when a miner wished to prolong his credit he had only to send his daughter or his wife, plain or pretty, it mattered not, provided they were complaisant.

Maheude, still imploring Maigrat with her look, felt herself uncomfortable under the pale keenness of his small eyes, which seemed to undress her. It made her angry; she would have understood before she had had seven children, when she was young. And she went off, violently dragging Lénore and Henri, who were occupied in picking up nutshells from the gutter where they were making investigations.

"This won't bring you luck, Monsieur Maigrat, remember!"

Now there only remained the Piolaine people. If these would not throw her a five-franc piece she might as well lie down and die. She had taken the Joiselle road on the left. The administration building was there at the corner of the road, a veritable brick palace, where the great people from Paris, princes and generals and members of the government, came every autumn to give large dinners. As she walked she was already spending the five francs, first bread, then coffee, afterward a quarter of butter, a bushel of potatoes for the morning soup and the evening stew; finally, perhaps, a bit of pigs' chitterlings, for the father needed meat.

The curé of Montsou, Abbé Joire, was passing, holding up his cassock with the delicate air of a fat, well-nourished cat afraid of wetting her fur. He was a gentleman who pretended not to interest himself in anything, so as not to vex either the workers or the masters.

"Good day, Monsieur le Curé."

Without stopping he smiled at the children and left her planted in the middle of the road. She was not religious, but she had suddenly imagined that this priest would give her something.

And the journey began again through the black, sticky mud. There were still two kilometers to walk, and it was necessary to drag the little ones more, for they were frightened and no longer amused themselves. To right and to left of the path the same vague landscape unrolled, enclosed within mossy palings, the same factory buildings, dirty with smoke, bristling with tall chimneys. Then the flat land was spread out in immense open fields, like an ocean of brown clods, without a tree trunk, as far as the violet line of the forest of Vandame.

"Carry me, Mother."

She carried them one after the other. Puddles made holes in the pathway, and she pulled up her clothes, fearful of arriving too dirty. Three times she nearly fell, so sticky was that confounded pavement. And as they at last arrived before the porch two enormous dogs threw themselves upon them, barking so loudly that the little ones yelled with terror. The coachman was obliged to take a whip.

"Leave your sabots and come in," repeated Honorine.

In the dining room the mother and children stood motionless, dazed by the sudden heat and very constrained beneath the gaze of this old lady and gentleman, who were stretched out in their easy chairs.

"Cécile," said the old lady, "fulfill your little duties."

The Grégoires charged Cécile with their charities. It was part of their idea of a good education. One must be charitable. They said themselves that their house was the house of God. Besides, they flattered themselves that they performed their charity with intelligence, and they were exercised by a constant fear lest they should be deceived and so encourage vice. So they never gave money, never! Not ten sous, not two sous, for it is a well-known fact that as soon as a poor man gets two sous he drinks them. Their alms were, therefore, always in kind, especially in warm clothing, distributed during the winter to needy children.

"Oh, the poor dears!" exclaimed Cécile. "How pale they are from the cold! Honorine, go and look for the parcel in the cupboard."

The servants were also gazing at these miserable creatures with the pity and vague uneasiness of girls who are in no difficulty about their own dinners. While the housemaid went upstairs the cook forgot her duties, leaving the rest of the brioche on the table, and stood there swinging her empty hands.

"I still have two woolen dresses and some comforters," Cécile went on. "You will see how warm they will be, the poor dears!"

Then Maheude found her tongue and stammered:

"Thank you so much, mademoiselle. You are all too good."

Tears had filled her eyes; she thought herself sure of the five francs and was only preoccupied by the way in which she would ask for them if they were not offered to her. The housemaid did not reappear, and there was a moment of embarrassed silence. From their mother's skirts the little ones opened their eyes wide and gazed at the brioche.

"You only have these two?" asked Mme Grégoire in order to break the silence.

"Oh, madame! I have seven of them."

M. Grégoire, who had gone back to his newspaper, sat up indignantly.

"Seven children! But why, good God?"

"It is imprudent," murmured the old lady.

Maheude made a vague gesture of apology. What would you have? One doesn't think about it at all; they come quite naturally. And then when they grow up they bring something in, and that makes the household go. Take their case, they could get on if it were not for the grandfather, who was getting quite stiff, and if among the lot only two of her sons and her eldest daughter were old enough to go down into the pit. It was necessary, all the same, to feed the little ones who brought nothing in.

"Then," said Mme Grégoire, "you have worked for a long time at the mines?"

A silent laugh lit up Maheude's pale face.

"Ah yes! Ah yes! I went down till I was twenty. The doctor said that I

should stay there for good after I had been confined the second time, because it seems that made something go wrong in my inside. Besides, then I got married and I had enough to do in the house. But on my husband's side, you see, they have been down there for ages. It goes up from grandfather to grandfather; one doesn't know how far back, quite to the beginning when they first took the pick down there at Réquillart."

M. Grégoire thoughtfully contemplated this woman and these pitiful children with their waxy flesh, their discolored hair, the degeneration which stunted them, gnawed by anemia, and with the melancholy ugliness of starvelings. There was silence again, and one only heard the burning coal as it gave out a jet of gas. The moist room had that heavy air of comfort in which our middle-class nooks of happiness slumber.

"What is she doing then?" exclaimed Cécile impatiently. "Mélanie, go up and tell her that the parcel is at the bottom of the cupboard, on the left."

In the meantime M. Grégoire repeated aloud the reflections inspired by the sight of these starving ones.

"There is evil in this world; it is quite true, but, my good woman, it must also be said that workpeople are never prudent. Thus instead of putting aside a few sous like our peasants, miners drink, get into debt and end by not having enough to support their families."

"Monsieur is right," replied Maheude sturdily. "They don't always keep to the right path. That's what I'm always saying to the ne'er-do-wells when they complain. Now I have been lucky; my husband doesn't drink. All the same, on feast Sundays he sometimes takes a drop too much, but it never goes farther. It is all the nicer of him, since before our marriage he drank like a hog, begging your pardon. And yet, you know, it doesn't help us much that he is so sensible. There are days like today when you might turn out all the drawers in the house and not find a farthing."

She wished to suggest to them the idea of the five-franc piece and went on in her low voice, explaining the fatal debt, small at first, then large and overwhelming. They paid regularly for many fortnights. But one day they got behind, and then it was all up. They could never catch up again. A gulf was formed, and the men became disgusted with work which did not even allow them to pay their way. Do what they could, there were nothing but difficulties until death. Besides, it must be understood that a collier needed a glass to wash away the dust. It began there, and then he was always in the inn when worries came. Without complaining of anyone, it might be that the workmen did not earn as much as they ought to.

"I thought," said Mme Grégoire, "that the company gave you lodging and firing?"

Maheude glanced sideways at the flaming coal in the fireplace.

"Yes, yes, they give us coal, not very grand, but it burns. As to lodging, it only costs six francs a month; that sounds like nothing, but it is often pretty hard to pay. Today they might cut me up into bits without getting two sous out of me. Where there's nothing, there's nothing."

The lady and gentleman were silent, softly stretched out and gradually

wearied and disquieted by the exhibition of this wretchedness. She feared she had wounded them and added with the stolid and just air of a practical woman:

"Oh, I don't want to complain. Things are like this, and one has to put up with them, all the more that it's no good struggling; perhaps we shouldn't change anything. The best is, is it not, to try and live honestly in the place in which the good God has put us?"

. M. Grégoire approved this emphatically.

"With such sentiments, my good woman, one is above misfortune."

. Honorine and Mélanie at last brought the parcel.

Cécile unfastened it and took out two dresses. She added comforters, even stockings and mittens. They all fitted beautifully; she hastened and made the servants put on the chosen garments, for her music mistress had just arrived, and she pushed the mother and children toward the door.

"We are very short," stammered Maheude; "if we only had a five-franc piece—"

The phrase was stifled, for the Maheus were proud and never begged. Cécile looked uneasily at her father, but the latter refused decisively with an air of duty.

"No, it is not our custom. We cannot do it."

Then the young girl, moved by the mother's overwhelmed face, wished to do all she could for the children. They were still looking fixedly at the brioche; she cut it in two and gave it to them.

"Here! This is for you."

. Then taking the pieces back, she asked for an old newspaper.

"Wait, you must share with your brothers and sisters."

And beneath the tender gaze of her parents she finally pushed them out of the room. The poor starving urchins went off, holding the brioche respectfully in their benumbed little hands.

Maheude dragged her children along the road, seeing neither the desert fields nor the black mud nor the great livid sky. As she passed through Montsou she resolutely entered Maigrat's shop and begged so persistently that at last she carried away two loaves, coffee, butter and even her five-franc piece, for the man also lent money by the week. It was not her that he wanted; it was Catherine; she understood that when he advised her to send her daughter for provisions. They would see about that. Catherine would box his ears if he came too close under her nose.

CHAPTER III

ELEVEN O'CLOCK STRUCK at the little church in the Deux-Cent-Quarante settlement, a brick chapel in which Abbé Joire came to say Mass on Sundays. In the school beside it, also of brick, one heard the faltering voices of the children, in spite of windows closed against the outside cold. The wide passages, divided into little gardens, back to back between the four large blocks of uniform houses, were deserted, and these gardens, devastated by the winter, exhibited

the destitution of their marly soil, lumped and spotted by the last vegetables. They were making soup; chimneys were smoking; a woman appeared at distant intervals along the fronts, opened a door and disappeared. From one end to the other, over the pavement, the pipes dripped into tubs, although it was no longer raining, so charged was this gray sky with moistness. And the village, built altogether in the midst of the vast plain and edged by its black roads as by a mourning border, had no touch of joyousness about it save the regular bands of its red tiles, constantly washed by showers.

When Maheude returned she went out of her way to buy potatoes from an overseer's wife, whose crop was not yet exhausted. Behind a curtain of sickly poplars, the only trees in these flat regions, was a group of isolated buildings, houses placed four together and surrounded by their gardens. As the company reserved this new experiment for the captains, the workpeople called this corner of the hamlet the settlement of the Bas-de-Soie, just as they called their own settlement Paie-tes-Dettes in good-humored irony of their wretchedness.

"Eh! Here we are," said Maheude, laden with parcels, pushing in Lénore and Henri, covered with mud and with faltering steps.

In front of the fire Estelle was screaming, cradled in Alzire's arms. The latter, having no more sugar and not knowing how to soothe her, had decided to pretend to give her the breast. This ruse often succeeded. But this time it was in vain for her to open her dress and to press the mouth against the lean breast of an eight-year-old invalid; the child was enraged at biting the skin and drawing nothing.

"Pass her to me," cried the mother as soon as she found herself free; "she won't let us say a word."

When she had taken from her bodice a breast as heavy as a leather bottle to the neck of which the brawler hung, suddenly silent, they were at last able to talk. Besides, everything was going on well; the little housekeeper had kept up the fire and had swept and arranged the room. And in the silence they heard upstairs the grandfather's snoring, the same rhythmic snoring which had not stopped for a moment.

"What a lot of things!" murmured Alzire, smiling at the provisions. "If you like, Mother, I'll make the soup."

The table was encumbered: a parcel of clothes, two loaves, potatoes, butter, coffee, chicory and half a pound of pigs' chitterlings.

"Oh, the soup!" said Maheude with an air of fatigue. "We must gather some sorrel and pull up some leeks. No! I will make some for the men afterward. Put some potatoes on to boil; we'll eat them with a little butter and some coffee, eh? Don't forget the coffee!"

But suddenly she thought of the brioche. She looked at the empty hands of Lénore and Henri, who were fighting on the floor, already rested and lively. These gluttons had eaten the brioche on the road. She boxed their ears, while Alzire, who was putting the saucepan on the fire, tried to appease her.

"Let them be, Mother. If it was for me, you know the brioche is all the same to me. They were hungry, walking so far."

Midday struck; they heard the clogs of the children coming out of school. The potatoes were cooked, and the coffee, thickened by a good half of chicory, was passing through the percolator with the singing noise of large drops. One corner of the table was free, but the mother only was eating there. The three children were satisfied to be on their knees, and all the time the little boy with silent voracity looked without saying anything at the chitterlings, excited by the greasy paper.

Maheude was drinking her coffee in little sips, with her hands round the glass to warm them, when Father Bonnemort came down. Usually he rose late, and his breakfast waited for him on the fire. But today he began to grumble because there was no soup. Then when his daughter-in-law said to him that one cannot always do what one likes, he ate his potatoes in silence. From time to time he got up to spit in the ashes for cleanliness and, settled in his chair, he rolled his food round in his mouth with lowered head and dull eyes.

"Ah, I forgot, Mother," said Alzire. "The neighbor came—"

Her mother interrupted her.

"She bothers me!"

There was a deep rancor against the Levaque woman, who had pleaded poverty the day before to avoid lending her anything, while she knew that she was just then in comfort, since her lodger, Bouteloup, had paid his fortnight in advance. In the settlement they did not usually lend from household to household.

"Here, you remind me," said Maheude. "Wrap up a millful of coffee. I will take it to Pierronne; I owe it her from the day before yesterday."

And when her daughter had prepared the packet she added that she would come back immediately to put the men's soup on the fire. Then she went out with Estelle in her arms, leaving old Bonnemort to chew his potatoes leisurely while Lénore and Henri fought for the fallen parings.

Instead of going round, Maheude went straight across through the gardens, for fear lest Levaque's wife should call her. Her garden was just next to that of the Pierronnes', and in the dilapidated trelliswork which separated them there was a hole through which they fraternized. The common well was there, serving four households. Beside it, behind a clump of feeble lilacs, was situated the shed, a low building full of old tools, in which were brought up the rabbits which were eaten on feast days. One o'clock struck; it was the hour for coffee, and not a soul was to be seen at the doors or windows. Only a workman belonging to the earth cutting, waiting the hour for descent, was digging up his patch of vegetable ground without raising his head. But as Maheude arrived opposite the other block of buildings she was surprised to see a gentleman and two ladies in front of the church. She stopped a moment and recognized them; it was Mme Hennebeau bringing her guests, the decorated gentleman and the lady in the fur mantle, to see the settlement.

"Oh, why did you take this trouble?" exclaimed Pierronne when Maheude had returned the coffee. "There was no hurry."

She was twenty-eight and was considered the beauty of the settlement, dark, with a low forehead, large eyes, straight mouth and coquettish as well,

with the neatness of a cat and with a good figure, for she had had no children. Her mother, Brûlé, the widow of a pikeman who died in the mine, after having sent her daughter to work in a factory, swearing that she should never marry a collier, had never ceased to be angry since she had married, somewhat late, Pierron, a widower with a girl of eight. However, the household lived very happily in the midst of chatter, of scandals which circulated concerning the husband's complacency and the wife's lovers. No debts, meat twice a week, a house kept so clean that one could see oneself in the saucepans. As an additional piece of luck, thanks to favors, the company had authorized her to sell bonbons and biscuits, jars of which she exhibited on two boards behind the windowpanes. This was six or seven sous' profit a day, and sometimes twelve on Sundays. The drawback to all this happiness was only Mother Brûlé, who screamed with all the rage of an old revolutionary, having to avenge the death of her man on the masters, and little Lydie, who pocketed, in the shape of frequent blows, the passions of the family.

"How big she is already!" said Pierronne, simpering at Estelle.

"Oh, the trouble that it gives! Don't talk of it!" said Maheude. "You are lucky not to have any. At least you can keep clean."

Although everything was in order in her house and she scrubbed every Saturday, she glanced with a jealous housekeeper's eye over this clean room, in which there was even a certain coquetry, gilt vases on the sideboard, a mirror, three framed prints.

Pierronne was about to drink her coffee alone, all her people being at the pit.

"You'll have a glass with me?" she said.

"No, thanks; I've just swallowed mine."

"What does that matter?"

In fact, it mattered nothing. And both began drinking slowly. Between the jars of biscuits and bonbons their eyes rested on the opposite houses, of which the little curtains in the windows formed a row, revealing by their more or less whiteness the virtues of the housekeepers. Those of the Levaques' were very dirty, veritable kitchen clouts, which seemed to have wiped the bottoms of the saucepans.

"How can they live in such dirt?" murmured Pierronne.

Then Maheude began and did not stop. Ah, if she had had a lodger like that Bouteloup she would have made the household go. When one knew how to do it a lodger was an excellent thing. Only one ought not to sleep with him. And then the husband had taken to drink, beat his wife and ran after the singers at the Montsou café concerts.

Pierronne assumed an air of profound disgust. These singers gave all sorts of diseases. There was one at Joiselle who had infected a whole pit.

"What surprises me is that you let your son go with their girl."

"Ah yes! But just stop it then! Their garden is next to ours. Zacharie was always there in summer with Philomène behind the lilacs, and they don't put themselves out on the shed; one couldn't draw water at the well without surprising them."

It was the usual history of the promiscuities of the settlement; boys and girls

became corrupted together, throwing themselves on their backsides, as they said, on the low, sloping roof of the shed when twilight came on. All the putters got their first child there when they did not take the trouble to go to Réquillart or into the cornfields. It was of no consequence; they married afterward; only the mothers were angry when their lads began too soon, for a lad who marries no longer brings anything into the family.

"In your place I would have done with it," said Pierronne sensibly. "Your Zacharie has already filled her twice, and they will go on and join themselves. Anyhow, the money is gone."

Maheude was furious and raised her hands.

"Listen to this: I will curse them if they get joined. Doesn't Zacharie owe us any respect? He has cost us something, hasn't he? Very well. He must return it before getting a wife to hang on him. What will become of us, eh, if our children begin at once to work for others? Might as well die!"

However, she grew calm.

"I'm speaking in a general way; we shall see later. It is fine and strong, your coffee; you make it proper."

And after a quarter of an hour spent over other stories she ran off, exclaiming that the men's soup was not yet made. Outside the children were going back to school; a few women were showing themselves at their doors, looking at Mme Hennebeau, who, with lifted finger, was explaining the settlement to her guests. This visit began to stir up the village. The earth-cutting man stopped digging for a moment, and two disturbed fowl were frightened in the gardens.

As Maheude returned she ran against the Levaque woman, who had come out to stop Dr Vanderhagen, a doctor of the company, a small, hurried man, overwhelmed by work, who gave his advice as he walked.

"Sir," she said, "I can't sleep; I feel ill everywhere. I must tell you about it."

He spoke to them all familiarly and replied without stopping:

"Just leave me alone; you drink too much coffee."

"And my husband, sir," said Maheude in her turn, "you must come and see him. He always has those pains in his legs."

"It is you who take too much out of him. Just leave me alone!"

The two women were left to gaze at the doctor's retreating back.

"Come in then," said the Levaque woman when she had exchanged a despairing shrug with her neighbor. "You know, there is something new. And you will take a little coffee. It is quite fresh."

Maheude refused but without energy. Well, a drop, at all events, not to disoblige. And she entered.

The room was black with dirt, the floor and the walls spotted with grease, the sideboard and the table sticky with filth; and the stink of a badly kept house took you by the throat. Near the fire, with his elbows on the table and his nose in his plate, Bouteloup, a broad, stout, placid man, still young for thirty-five, was finishing the remains of his boiled beef, while standing in front of him, little Achille, Philomène's first-born, who was already in his third year, was looking at him in the silent, supplicating way of a gluttonous

animal. The lodger, very kind behind his big brown beard, from time to time stuffed a piece of meat into his mouth.

"Wait till I sugar it," said the Levaque woman, putting some brown sugar beforehand into the coffepot.

Six years older than he was, she was hideous and worn out, with her bosom hanging on her belly and her belly on her thighs, with a flattened muzzle and grayish hair always uncombed. He had taken her naturally, without choosing, the same as he did his soup, in which he found hairs, or his bed, of which the sheets lasted for three months. She was part of the lodging; the husband liked repeating that good reckonings make good friends.

"I was going to tell you," she went on, "that Pierronne was seen yesterday prowling about on the Bas-de-Soie side. The gentleman that you know was waiting for her behind Rasseneur's, and they went off together along the canal. Eh, that's nice, isn't it? A married woman!"

"Gracious!" said Maheude. "Pierron, before marrying her, used to give the captain rabbits; now it costs him less to lend his wife."

Bouteloup began to laugh enormously and threw a fragment of sauced bread into Achilles's mouth. The two women went on relieving themselves with regard to Pierronne—a flirt, not prettier than anyone else, but always occupied in looking after every freckle of her skin, in washing herself and putting on pomade. Anyhow, it concerned the husband, if he liked that sort of thing. There were men so ambitious that they would wipe the masters' behinds to hear them say thank you. And they were only interrupted by the arrival of a neighbor bringing in a little urchin of nine months, Désirée, Philomène's youngest; Philomène, taking her breakfast at the screening shed, had arranged that they should bring her little one down there, where she suckled it, seated for a moment in the coal.

"I can't leave mine for a moment; she screams directly," said Maheude, looking at Estelle, who was asleep in her arms.

But she did not succeed in avoiding the domestic affair which she had read in the other's eyes.

"I say, now we ought to get that settled."

At first the two mothers, without need for talking about it, had agreed not to conclude the marriage. If Zacharie's mother wished to get her son's wages as long as possible, Philomène's mother was enraged at the idea of abandoning her daughter's wages. There was no hurry; the second mother had even preferred to keep the little one, as long as there was only one; but when it began to grow and eat and another one came, she found that she was losing and furiously pushed on the marriage, like a woman who does not care to throw away her money.

"Zacharie has drawn his lot," she went on, "and there's nothing in the way. When shall it be?"

"Wait till the fine weather," replied Maheude constrainedly. "They are a nuisance, these things! As if they couldn't wait to be married before going together! My word! I would strangle Catherine if I knew that she were to do that."

The other woman shrugged her shoulders.

"Let be! She'll do like the others."

Bouteloup, with the tranquillity of a man who is at home, searched about on the dresser for bread. Vegetables for Levaque's soup, potatoes and leeks, lay about on a corner of the table, half peeled, taken up and dropped a dozen times in the midst of continual gossiping. The woman was about to go on with them again when she dropped them anew and planted herself before the window.

"What's that there? Why, there's Madame Hennebeau with some people. They are going into Pierronne's."

At once both of them started again on the subject of Pierronne. Oh, whenever the company brought any visitors to the settlement they never failed to go straight to her place, because it was clean. No doubt they never told them stories about the head captain. One can afford to be clean when one has lovers who earn three thousand francs and are lodged and warmed without counting presents. If it was clean above it was not clean underneath. And all the time that the visitors remained opposite they went on chattering.

"There, they are coming out," said Levaque at last. "They are going all around. Why, look, my dear—I believe they are going into your place."

Maheude was seized with fear. Who knew whether Alzire had sponged over the table? And her soup, also, which was not yet ready! She stammered a good day and ran off home without a single glance aside.

But everything was bright. Alzire, very seriously, with a cloth in front of her, had set about making the soup, seeing that her mother did not return. She had pulled up the last leeks from the garden, gathered the sorrel and was just then cleaning the vegetables, while a large kettle on the fire was heating the water for the men's baths when they should return. Henri and Lénore were good for once, being absorbed in tearing up an old almanac. Father Bonnemort was smoking his pipe in silence. As Maheude was getting her breath Mme Hennebeau knocked.

"You will allow me, will you not, my good woman?"

Tall and fair, a little heavy in her superb maturity of forty years, she smiled with an effort of affability, without showing too prominently her fear of soiling her bronze silk dress and black velvet mantle.

"Come in, come in," she said to her guests. "We are not disturbing anyone. Now isn't this clean again? And this good woman has seven children! All our households are like this. I ought to explain to you that the company rents them the house at six francs a month. A large room on the ground floor, two rooms above, a cellar and a garden."

The decorated gentleman and the lady in the fur cloak, arrived that morning by train from Paris, opened their eyes vaguely, exhibiting on their faces their astonishment at all these new things which took them out of their element.

"And a garden!" repeated the lady. "One could live on that! It is charming!"

"We give them more coal than they can burn," went on Mme Hennebeau. "A doctor visits them twice a week, and when they are old they receive pensions, although nothing is held back from their wages."

"A Thebaid! A real land of milk and honey!" murmured the gentleman in delight.

Maheude had hastened to offer chairs. The ladies refused. Mme Hennebeau was already getting tired, happy for a moment to amuse herself in the weariness of her exile by playing the part of exhibiting the beasts, but immediately disgusted by the sickly odor of wretchedness, in spite of the special cleanliness of the houses into which she ventured. Besides, she was only repeating odd phrases which she had overheard, without ever troubling herself further about this race of workpeople who were laboring and suffering beside her.

"What beautiful children!" murmured the lady, who thought them hideous, with their large heads beneath their bushy, straw-colored hair.

And Maheude had to tell their ages; they also asked her questions about Estelle, out of politeness. Father Bonnemort respectfully took his pipe out of his mouth, but he was not the less an object of uneasiness, so worn out by his forty years underground, with his stiff limbs, deformed body and earthy face; and as a violent spasm of coughing took him he preferred to go and spit outside, with the idea that his black expectoration would make people uncomfortable.

Alzire received all the compliments. What an excellent little housekeeper with her cloth! They congratulated the mother on having a little daughter so sensible for her age. And none spoke of the hump, though looks of uneasy compassion were constantly turned toward the poor little invalid.

"Now!" concluded Mme Hennebeau. "If they ask you about our settlements at Paris you will know what to reply. Never more noise than this, patriarchal manners, all happy and well off, as you see, a place where you might come to recruit a little on account of the good air and the tranquillity."

"It is marvelous, marvelous!" exclaimed the gentleman in a final outburst of enthusiasm.

They left with that enchanted air with which people leave a booth in a fair, and Maheude, who accompanied them, remained on the threshold while they went away slowly, talking very loudly. The streets were full of people, and they had to pass through several groups of women, attracted by the news of their visit, which was hawked from house to house.

Just then Levaque, in front of her door, had stopped Pierronne, who was drawn by curiosity. Both of them affected a painful surprise. What now? Were these people going to bed at the Maheus? But it was not so very delightful a place.

"Always without a sou, with all that they earn! Lord, when people have vices!"

"I have just heard that she went this morning to beg at Piolaine, and Maigrat, who had refused them bread, has given them something. We know how Maigrat pays himself!"

"On her? Oh no! That would need some courage. It's Catherine that he's after."

"Why, didn't she have the cheek to say just now that she would strangle

Catherine if she were to come to that? As if big Chaval for ever so long had not put her backside on the shed!"

"Hush, here they are!"

Then Levaque and Pierronne, with a peaceful air and without impolite curiosity, contented themselves with watching the visitors out of the corners of their eyes. Then by a gesture they quickly called Maheude, who was still carrying Estelle in her arms. And all three, motionless, watched the visitors slowly disappear. When they were some thirty paces off the gossiping recommenced with redoubled vigor.

"They carry plenty of money on their skins; worth more than themselves, perhaps."

"Ah, sure! I don't know the other, but the one that belongs here, I wouldn't give four sous for her, big as she is. They do tell stories——"

"Eh? What stories?"

"Why, she has men! First, the engineer."

"That lean little creature? Oh, he's too small! She would lose him in the sheets."

"What does that matter if it amuses her? I don't trust a woman who puts on such proud airs and never seems to be pleased where she is. Just look how she wags her rump, as if she felt contempt for us all. Is that nice?"

The visitors went along at the same slow pace, still talking, when a carriage stopped in the road before the church. A gentleman of about forty-eight got out of it, dressed in a black frock coat and with a very dark complexion and an authoritative, correct expression.

"The husband," murmured Levaque, lowering her voice, as if he could hear her, seized by that hierarchic fear which the manager inspired in his ten thousand workpeople. "It's true, though, that he has a cuckold's head, that man."

Now the whole settlement was out of doors. The curiosity of the women increased. The groups approached each other and were melted into one crowd, while bands of urchins, with unwiped noses and gaping mouths, dawdled along the pavements. For a moment the schoolmaster's pale head was also seen behind the schoolhouse hedge. Among the gardens the man who was digging stood with one foot on his spade and with rounded eyes. And the murmur of gossiping gradually increased with a sound of rattles, like a gust of wind among dry leaves.

It was especially before the Levaques' door that the crowd was thickest. Two women had come forward, then ten, then twenty. Pierronne was prudently silent now that there were too many ears about. Maheude, one of the more reasonable, also contented herself with looking on; and to calm Estelle, who was awake and screaming, she had tranquilly drawn out her suckling animal's breast, which hung as if pulled down by the continual running of its milk. When M. Hennebeau had seated the ladies in the carriage, which went off in the direction of Marchiennes, there was a final explosion of clattering voices, all the women gesticulating and talking in each other's faces in the midst of a tumult as of an anthill in revolution.

But three o'clock struck. The workers of the earth cutting, Bouteloup and

the others, had set out. Suddenly around the church appeared the first colliers returning from the pit with black faces and damp garments, crossing their arms and expanding their backs. Then there was confusion among the women: they all began to run home with the terror of housekeepers who had been led astray by too much coffee and too much tattle, and one heard nothing more than this restless cry, pregnant with quarrels:

"Good lord, and my soup! And my soup, which isn't ready!"

CHAPTER IV

WHEN MAHEU CAME in after having left Etienne at Rasseneur's he found Catherine, Zacharie and Jeanlin seated at the table, finishing their soup. On returning from the pit they were always so hungry that they ate in their damp clothes, without even cleaning themselves, and no one was waited for; the table was laid from morning to night; there was always someone there swallowing his portion, according to the chances of work.

As he entered the door Maheu saw the provisions. He said nothing, but his uneasy face lit up. All the morning the emptiness of the cupboard, the thought of the house without coffee and without butter, had been troubling him; the recollection came to him painfully while he was hammering at the seam, stifled at the bottom of the cutting. What would his wife do, and what would become of them if she were to return with empty hands? And now here was everything! She would tell him about it later on. He laughed with satisfaction.

Catherine and Jeanlin had risen and were taking their coffee standing, while Zacharie, not filled with the soup, cut himself a large slice of bread and covered it with butter. Although he saw the chitterlings on a plate he did not touch them, for meat was for the father when there was only enough for one. All of them had washed down their soup with a big bumper of fresh water, the good, clear drink of the fortnight's end.

"I have no beer," said Maheude when the father had seated himself in his turn. "I wanted to keep a little money. But if you would like some the little one can go and fetch a pint."

He looked at her in astonishment. What, she had money too?

"No, no," he said. "I've had a glass; it's all right."

And Maheu began to swallow by slow spoonfuls the paste of bread, potatoes, leeks and onions piled up in the bowl which served him as a plate. Maheude, without putting Estelle down, helped Alzire to give him all that he required, pushed near him the butter and the meat and put his coffee on the fire to keep it quite warm.

In the meanwhile, beside the fire, they began to wash themselves in the half of a barrel transformed into a tub. Catherine, whose turn came first, had filled it with warm water, and she undressed herself tranquilly, took off her cap, her jacket, her breeches and even her chemise, habituated to this since the age of eight, having grown up without seeing any harm in it. She only turned with her stomach to the fire, then rubbed herself vigorously with black soap. No

one looked at her; even Lénore and Henri were no longer inquisitive to see how she was made. When she was clean she went up the stairs quite naked, leaving her damp chemise and other garments in a heap on the floor. But a quarrel broke out between the two brothers: Jeanlin had hastened to jump into the tub under the pretense that Zacharie was still eating, and the latter hustled him, claiming his turn and calling out that he was polite enough to allow Catherine to wash herself first, but he did not wish to have the rinsings of the young urchins, all the less since when Jeanlin had been in it would do to fill the school inkpots. They ended by washing themselves together, also turning toward the fire, and they even helped each other, rubbing one another's backs. Then, like their sister, they disappeared up the staircase, naked.

"What a slop they do make!" murmured Maheude, taking up their garments from the floor to put them to dry. "Alzire, just sponge up a bit."

But a disturbance on the other side of the wall cut short her speech. One heard a man's oaths, a woman's crying, a whole stampede of battle, with hollow blows that sounded like the shock of an empty gourd.

"Levaque's wife is catching it," Maheu peacefully stated as he scraped the bottom of his bowl with the spoon. "It's queer; Bouteloup made out that the soup was ready."

"Ah yes, ready," said Maheude. "I saw the vegetables on the table, not even cleaned."

The cries redoubled, and there was a terrible push which shook the wall, followed by complete silence. Then the miner, swallowing the last spoonful, concluded with an air of calm justice:

"If the soup is not ready one can understand."

And after having drunk a glassful of water, he attacked the chitterlings. He cut square pieces, put the point of his knife into them and ate them on his bread without a fork. There was no talking when the father was eating. He himself was hungry in silence. He did not recognize the usual taste of Maigrat's provisions—this must come from somewhere else—however, he put no questions to his wife. He only asked if the old man was still sleeping upstairs. No, the grandfather had gone out for his usual walk. And there was silence again.

But the odor of the meat made Lénore and Henri lift up their heads from the floor, where they were amusing themselves with making rivulets with the spilled water. Both of them came and planted themselves near their father, the little one in front. Their eyes followed each morsel, full of hope when it set out from the plate and with an air of consternation when it was engulfed in the mouth. At last the father noticed the gluttonous desire which made their faces pale and their lips moist.

"Have the children had any of it?" he asked.

And as his wife hesitated:

"You know I don't like injustice. It takes away my appetite when I see them there, begging for bits."

"But they've had some of it," she exclaimed angrily. "If you were to listen to them you might give them your share and the others' too; they would fill themselves till they burst. Isn't it true, Alzire, that we have all had some?"

"Sure enough, Mother," replied the little humpback, who under such circumstances could tell lies with the self-possession of a grown-up person.

Lénore and Henri stood motionless, shocked and rebellious at such lying, when they themselves were whipped if they did not tell the truth. Their little hearts began to swell, and they longed to protest and to say that they, at all events, were not there when the others had some.

"Get along with you," said the mother, driving them to the other end of the room. "You ought to be ashamed of being always in your father's plate; and even if he was the only one to have any, doesn't he work while all you, a lot of good-for-nothings, can't do anything but spend? Yes, and the more the bigger you are."

Maheu called them back. He seated Lénore on his left thigh, Henri on the right; then he finished the chitterlings by playing at dinner with them. He cut small pieces, and each had his share. The children devoured with delight.

When he had finished he said to his wife:

"No, don't give me my coffee. I'm going to wash first, and just give me a hand to throw away this dirty water."

They took hold of the handles of the tub and emptied it into the gutter before the door when Jeanlin came down in dry breeches and a woolen blouse too large for him, which was weary of fading on his brother's back. Seeing him sulkily going out through the open door, his mother stopped him.

"Where are you off to?"

"Over there."

"Where? Over there! Listen to me. You go and gather a dandelion salad for this evening. Eh, do you hear? If you don't bring a salad back you'll have to deal with me."

"All right!"

Jeanlin set out with hands in his pockets, trailing his sabots and slouching along, with his slender loins of a ten-year-old urchin, like an old miner. In his turn, Zacharie came down, more carefully dressed, his body covered by a black woolen knitted jacket with blue stripes. His father called out to him not to return late; and he left, nodding his head with his pipe between his teeth, without replying. Again the tub was filled with warm water. Maheu was already slowly taking off his jacket. At a look Alzire led Lénore and Henri outside to play. The father did not like washing *en famille*, as was practiced in many houses in the settlement. He blamed no one, however; he simply said that it was good for the children to dabble together.

"What are you doing up there?" cried Maheude up the staircase.

"I'm mending my dress that I tore yesterday," replied Catherine.

"All right. Don't come down; your father is washing."

Then Maheu and Maheude were left alone. The latter decided to place Estelle on a chair, and by a miracle, finding herself near the fire, the child did not scream but turned toward her parents the vague eyes of a little creature without intelligence. He was crouching before the tub, quite naked, having first plunged his head into it, well rubbed with that black soap, the constant use of which discolored and made yellow the hair of the race. After-

ward he got into the water, lathered his chest, belly, arms and thighs, scraping them energetically with both fists. His wife, standing by, watched him.

"Well then," she began, "I saw your eyes when you came in. You were bothered, eh? And it eased you, those provisions. Fancy, those Piolaine people didn't give me a sou! Oh, they are kind enough; they have dressed the little ones, and I was ashamed to ask them, for it crosses me to ask for things."

She interrupted herself a moment to wedge Estelle into the chair, lest she should tip over. The father continued to work away at his skin, without hastening by a question this story which interested him, patiently waiting for light.

"I must tell you that Maigrat had refused me—oh, straight, like one kicks a dog out of doors. Guess if I was on a spree! They keep you warm, woolen garments, but they don't put anything into your stomach, eh?"

He lifted his head, still silent. Nothing at Piolaine, nothing at Maigrat's; then where? But, as usual, she was pulling up her sleeves to wash his back and those parts which he could not himself easily reach. Besides, he liked her to soap him, to rub him everywhere till she almost broke her wrists. She took soap and worked away at his shoulders while he held himself stiff so as to resist the shock.

"Then I returned to Maigrat's and said to him—ah, I said something to him! And that it didn't do to have no heart and that evil would happen to him if there were any justice. That bothered him; he turned his eyes and would like to have got away."

From the back she had got down to the buttocks and was pushing into the folds, not leaving any part of the body without passing over it, making him shine like her three saucepans on Saturdays after a big clean. Only she began to sweat with this tremendous exertion of her arms, so exhausted and out of breath that her words were choked.

"At last he called me an old nuisance. We shall have bread until Saturday, and the best is that he has lent me five francs. I have got butter, coffee and chicory from him. I was even going to get the meat and potatoes there, only I saw that he was grumbling. Seven sous for the chitterlings, eighteen for the potatoes, and I've got three francs seventy-five left for a ragout and a meat soup. Eh, I don't think I've wasted my morning!"

Now she began to wipe him, plugging with a towel the parts that would not dry. Feeling happy and without thinking of the future debt, he burst out laughing and took her in his arms.

"Leave me alone, stupid! You are damp and wetting me. Only I'm afraid Maigrat has an idea—"

She was about to speak of Catherine but she stopped. What was the good of disturbing him? It would only lead to endless discussion.

"What idea?" he asked.

"Why, ideas of robbing us. Catherine will have to examine the bill carefully."

He took her in his arms again and this time did not let her go. The bath always finished in this way: she enlivened him by the hard rubbing and then

by the towels which tickled the hairs of his arms and chest. Besides, among all his mates of the settlement it was the hour for stupidities, when more children were planted than were wanted. At night all the family were about. He pushed her toward the table, jesting like a worthy man who was enjoying the only good moment of the day, calling that taking his dessert, and a dessert which cost nothing. She, with her loose figure and breast, struggled a little for fun.

"You are stupid! My lord, you are stupid! And there's Estelle looking at us. Wait till I turn her head."

"Oh, bosh! At three months; as if she understood!"

When he got up Maheu simply put on a dry pair of breeches. He liked, when he was clean and had taken his pleasure with his wife, to remain naked for a while. On his white skin, the whiteness of an anemic girl, the scratches and gashes of the coal left tattoo marks, grafts, as the miners called them; and he was proud of them and exhibited his big arms and broad chest, shining like veined marble. In summer all the miners could be seen in this condition at their doors. He even went there for a moment now, in spite of the wet weather, and shouted out a rough joke to a comrade, whose breast was also naked, on the other side of the gardens. Others also appeared. And the children, trailing along the pathways, raised their heads and also laughed with delight at all this weary flesh of workers displayed in the open air.

While drinking his coffee, without yet putting on a shirt, Maheu told his wife about the engineer's anger over the planking. He was calm and unbent and listened with a nod of approval to the sensible advice of Maheude, who showed much common sense in such affairs. She always repeated to him that nothing was gained by struggling against the company. She afterward told him about Mme Hennebeau's visit. Without saying so, both of them were proud of this.

"Can I come down yet?" asked Catherine from the top of the staircase.

"Yes, yes; your father is drying himself."

The young girl had put on her Sunday dress, an old frock of rough blue poplin, already faded and worn in the folds. She had on a very simple bonnet of black tulle.

"Hallo! You're dressed. Where are you going to?"

"I'm going to Montsou to buy a ribbon for my bonnet. I've taken off the old one; it was too dirty."

"Have you got money then?"

"No, but Mouquette promised to lend me half a franc."

The mother let her go. But at the door she called her back.

"Here! Don't go and buy that ribbon at Maigrat's. He will rob you and he will think that we are rolling in wealth."

The father, who was crouching down before the fire to dry his neck and shoulders more quickly, contented himself with adding:

"Try not to dawdle about at night on the road."

In the afternoon Maheu worked in his garden. Already he had sown there potatoes, beans and peas, and he now set about replanting cabbage and lettuce

plants, which he had kept fresh from the night before. This bit of garden furnished them with vegetables, except potatoes, of which they never had enough. He understood gardening very well and could even grow artichokes, which was treated as sheer display by the neighbors. As he was preparing the bed Levaque just then came out to smoke a pipe in his own square, looking at the cos lettuce which Bouteloup had planted in the morning, for without the lodger's energy in digging nothing would have grown there but nettles. And a conversation arose over the trellis. Levaque, refreshed and excited by thrashing his wife, vainly tried to take Maheu off to Rasseneur's. Why, was he afraid of a glass? They could have a game at skittles, lounge about for a while with the mates and then come back to dinner. That was the way of life after leaving the pit. No doubt there was no harm in that, but Maheu was obstinate; if he did not replant his lettuces they would be faded by tomorrow. In reality he refused out of good sense, not wishing to ask a farthing from his wife out of the change of the five-franc piece.

Five o'clock was striking when Pierronne came to know if it was with Jeanlin that her Lydie had gone off. Levaque replied that it must be something of that sort, for Bébert had also disappeared, and those rascals always went prowling about together. When Maheu had quieted them by speaking of the dandelion salad he and his comrade set about joking the young woman with the coarseness of good-natured devils. She was angry but did not go away, in reality, tickled by the strong words which made her scream with her hands to her sides. A lean woman came to her aid, stammering with anger like the clucking of a hen. Others in the distance on their doorsteps confided their alarms. Now the school was closed; all the children were running about; there was a rumbling of little creatures shouting and tumbling and fighting, while those fathers who were not at the public house were resting in groups of three or four, crouching on their heels as they did in the mine, smoking their pipes with an occasional word in the shelter of a wall. Pierronne went off in a fury when Levaque wanted to feel if her thighs were firm, and he himself decided to go alone to Rasseneur's, since Maheu was still planting.

Twilight suddenly came on; Maheude lit the lamp, irritated because neither her daughter nor the boys had come back. She could have guessed as much; they never succeeded in taking together the only meal of the day at which it was possible for them to be all round the table. Then she was waiting for the dandelion salad. What could he be gathering at this hour, in the blackness of an oven, that nuisance of a child! A salad would accompany so well the stew which was simmering on the fire—potatoes, leeks, sorrel, fricassee with fried onion. The whole house smelled of that fried onion, that good odor which gets rank so soon and which penetrates the bricks of the settlements with such infection that one perceives it far off in the country, the violent flavor of the poor man's kitchen.

Maheu, when he left the garden at nightfall, at once fell into a chair with his head against the wall. As soon as he sat down in the evening he went to sleep. The clock struck seven; Henri and Lénore had just broken a plate by persisting in helping Alzire, who was laying the table, when Father Bonnemort

came in first, in a hurry to dine and go back to the pit. Then Maheude woke up Maheu.

"Come and eat! So much the worse! They are big enough to find the house. The nuisance is the salad!"

CHAPTER V

AT RASSENEUR'S, after having eaten his soup, Etienne went back into the small chamber beneath the roof and facing the Voreux, which he was to occupy, and fell onto his bed, dressed as he was, overcome with fatigue. For two days he had slept only four hours. When he awoke in the twilight he was dazed for a moment, not recognizing his surroundings, and he felt such uneasiness and his head was so heavy that he rose painfully, with the idea of getting some fresh air before having his dinner and going to bed for the night.

Outside the weather was becoming milder: the sooty sky was growing copper-colored, laden with one of those warm rains of the *nord*, the approach of which one feels by the moist warmth of the air, and the night was coming on in great mists which drowned the distant landscape of the plain. Over this immense sea of reddish earth the low sky seemed to melt into black dust, without a breath of wind now to animate the darkness. It was the wan and deathly melancholy of a funeral.

Etienne walked straight ahead at random, with no other aim but to shake off his fever. When he passed before the Voreux, already growing gloomy at the bottom of its hole and with no lantern yet shining from it, he stopped a moment to watch the departure of the dayworkers. No doubt six o'clock had struck; landers, porters from the pit eye and grooms were going away in bands, mixed with the vague and laughing figures of the screening girls in the shade.

At first it was Brûlé and her son-in-law Pierron. She was abusing him because he had not supported her in a quarrel with an overseer over her reckoning of stones.

"Get along, damned good-for-nothing! Do you call yourself a man to lower yourself like that before one of these beasts who devour us?"

Pierron followed her peacefully, without replying. At last he said:

"I suppose I ought to jump on a boss? Thanks for showing me how to get into a mess!"

"Bend your backside to them then," she shouted. "By God, if my daughter had listened to me! It's not enough for them to kill the father. Perhaps you'd like me to say: 'Thank you.' No, I'll have their skins first!"

Their voices were lost. Etienne saw her disappear with her eagle nose, her flying white hair, her long, lean arms that gesticulated furiously. But the conversation of two young people behind caused him to listen. He had recognized Zacharie, who was waiting there and who had just been addressed by his friend Mouquet.

"Are you here?" said the latter. "We will have something to eat and then off to the Volcan."

"Directly. I've something to attend to."

"What then?"

The lander turned and saw Philomène coming out of the screening shed. He thought he understood.

"Very well, if it's that. Then I go ahead."

"Yes, I'll catch you up."

As he went away Mouquet met his father, old Mouque, who was also coming out of the Voreux. The two men simply wished each other good evening, the son taking the main road while the father went along by the canal.

Zacharie was already pushing Philomène, in spite of her resistance, into the same solitary path. She was in a hurry, another time; and the two wrangled like old housemates. There was no fun in only seeing one another out of doors, especially in winter, when the earth is moist and there are no wheat fields to lie in.

"No, no, it's not that," he whispered impatiently. "I've something to say to you." He led her gently with his arm round her waist. Then when they were in the shadow of the pit bank he asked if she had any money.

"What for?" she demanded.

Then he became confused, spoke of a debt of two francs which had reduced his family to despair.

"Hold your tongue! I've seen Mouquet; you're going again to the Volcan with him, where those dirty singer women are."

He defended himself, struck his chest, gave his word of honor. Then as she shrugged her shoulders he said suddenly:

"Come with us if it will amuse you. You see that you don't put me out. What do I want to do with them singers? Will you come?"

"And the little one?" she replied. "How can one stir with a child that's always screaming? Let me go back; I guess they're not getting on at the house."

But he held her and entreated. See, it was only not to look foolish before Mouquet, to whom he had promised. A man could not go to bed every evening like the fowl. She was overcome and pulled up the skirt of her gown; with her nail she cut the thread and drew out some half-franc pieces from a corner of the hem. For fear of being robbed by her mother she hid there the profit of the overtime work she did at the pit.

"I've got five, you see," she said. "I'll give you three. Only you must swear that you'll make your mother decide to let us marry. We've had enough of this life in the open air. And Mother reproaches me for every mouthful I eat. Swear first."

She spoke with the soft voice of a big, delicate girl, without passion, simply tired of her life. He swore, exclaimed that it was a sacred promise; then when he had got the three pieces he kissed her, tickled her, made her laugh and would have pushed things to an extreme in this corner of the pit bank, which was the winter chamber of their household, if she had not again refused, saying that it would not give her any pleasure. She went back to the settlement alone, while he cut across the fields to rejoin his companion.

Etienne had followed them mechanically from afar, without understanding,

regarding it as a simple rendezvous. The girls were precocious in the pits, and he recalled the Lille workgirls whom he had waited for behind the factories, those bands of girls, corrupted at fourteen in the abandonment of their wretchedness. But another meeting surprised him more. He stopped.

At the bottom of the pit bank, in a hollow into which some large stones had slipped, little Jeanlin was violently snubbing Lydie and Bébert, seated one at his right, the other at his left.

"What do you say? Eh? I'll slap each of you if you want more. Who thought of it first, eh?"

In fact, Jeanlin had had an idea. After having rolled about in the meadows along the canal for an hour, gathering dandelions with the two others, it had occurred to him, before this pile of salad, that they would never eat all that at home; and instead of going back to the settlement he had gone to Montsou, keeping Bébert to watch and making Lydie ring at the houses and offer the dandelions. He was experienced enough to know, as he said, that girls could sell what they liked. In the ardor of business, the entire pile had disappeared, but the girl had gained eleven sous. And now with empty hands the three were dividing the profits.

"That's not fair!" Bébert declared. "Must divide into three. If you keep seven sous we shall only have two each."

"What? Not fair!" replied Jeanlin furiously. "I gathered more, first of all."

The other usually submitted with timid admiration and a credulity which always made him the dupe. Though older and stronger, he even allowed himself to be struck. But this time the sight of all that money excited him to rebellion.

"He's robbing us, Lydie, isn't he? If he doesn't share we'll tell his mother."

Jeanlin at once thrust his fist beneath the other's nose.

"Say that again! I'll go and say at your house that you sold my mother's salad. And then, you silly beast, how can I divide eleven sous into three? Just try and see, if you're so clever. Here are your two sous each. Just look sharp and take them, or I'll put them in my pocket."

Bébert was vanquished and accepted the two sous. Lydie, who was trembling, had said nothing, for with Jeanlin she experienced the fear and the tenderness of a little beaten woman. When he held out the two sous to her she advanced her hand with a submissive laugh. But he suddenly changed his mind.

"Eh! What will you do with all that? Your mother will nab them, sure enough, if you don't know how to hide them from her. I'd better keep them for you. When you want money you can ask me for it."

And the nine sous disappeared. To shut her mouth he had put his arms around her and was rolling with her over the pit bank. She was his little wife, and in dark corners they used to try together the love which they heard and saw in their homes, behind partitions, through the cracks of doors. They knew everything, but they were able to do nothing, being too young, fumbling and playing for hours at the games of vicious puppies. He called that playing at papa and mamma, and when he chased her she ran away and let herself be

caught with the delicious trembling of instinct, often angry, but always yielding, in the expectation of something which never came.

As Bébert was not admitted to these games and received a cuffing whenever he wanted to touch Lydie, he was always constrained, agitated by anger and uneasiness when the other two were amusing themselves, which they did not hesitate to do in his presence. His one idea, therefore, was to frighten them and disturb them, calling out that someone could see them.

"It's all up! There's a man looking."

This time he told the truth; it was Etienne, who had decided to continue his walk. The children jumped up and ran away, and he passed by round the bank, following the canal, amused at the terror of these little rascals. No doubt it was too early at their age, but they saw and heard so much that one would have to tie them up to restrain them. Yet Etienne became sad.

A hundred paces farther on he came across more couples. He had arrived at Réquillart, and there, around the old ruined mine, all the girls of Montsou prowled about with their lovers. It was the common rendezvous, the remote and deserted spot to which the putters came to get their first child when they dared not risk the shed. The broken palings opened to everyone the old yard, now become a nondescript piece of ground, obstructed by the ruins of the two sheds which had fallen in and by the skeletons of the large buttresses which were still standing. Derelict trams were lying about and piles of old, rotting wood, while a dense vegetation was reconquering this corner of ground, displaying itself in thick grass and springing up in young trees that were already vigorous. Every girl found herself at home here; there were concealed holes for all; their lovers placed them over beams behind the timber, in the trams; they even lay elbow to elbow without troubling about their neighbors. And it seemed that around this extinguished engine, near this shaft weary of disgorging coal, there was a revenge of creation in the free love which, beneath the lash of instinct, planted children in the bellies of these girls who were yet hardly women.

Yet a caretaker lived there, old Mouque, to whom the company had given up, almost beneath the destroyed tower, two rooms which were constantly threatened by destruction from the expected fall of the last walls. He had even been obliged to support a part of the roof, and he lived there very comfortably with his family, he and Mouquet in one room, Mouquette in the other. As the windows no longer possessed a single pane, he had decided to close them by nailing up boards; one could not see well, but it was warm. For the rest, this caretaker cared for nothing: he went to look after his horses at the Voreux and never troubled himself about the ruins of Réquillart, of which the shaft only was preserved, in order to serve as a chimney in connection with the ventilation of the neighboring pit.

It was thus that Father Mouque was ending his old age in the midst of love. Ever since she was ten Mouquette had been lying about in all the corners of the ruins, not as a timid and still-green little urchin like Lydie, but as a girl who was already big and a mate for bearded lads. The father had nothing to say, for she was considerate and never introduced a lover into the house. Then he

was used to this sort of accident. When he went to the Voreux, when he came back, whenever he came out of his hole, he could scarcely put a foot down without treading on a couple in the grass; and it was worse if he wanted to gather wood to heat his soup or look for burdocks for his rabbit at the other end of the enclosure. Then he saw one by one the voluptuous noses of all the girls of Montsou rising up around him, while he had to be careful not to knock against the limbs stretched out level with the paths. Besides, these meetings had gradually ceased to disturb either him, who was simply taking care not to stumble, or the girls, whom he allowed to finish their affairs, going away with discreet little steps like a worthy man who was at peace with the ways of nature. Only just as they now knew him he at last also knew them, as one knows the rascally magpies who become corrupted in the pear trees in the garden. Ah, youth! Youth! How it goes on; how wild it is! Sometimes he wagged his chin with silent regret, turning away from the noisy wantons who were breathing too loudly in the darkness. Only one thing put him out of temper: two lovers had acquired the bad habit of embracing outside his wall. It was not that it prevented him from sleeping, but they leaned against the wall so heavily that at last they damaged it.

Every evening old Mouque received a visit from his friend Father Bonnemort, who regularly before dinner took the same walk. The two old men spoke little, scarcely exchanging ten words during the half-hour that they spent together. But it cheered them thus to think over the days of old, to chew their recollections over again without need to talk of them. At Réquillart they sat on a beam side by side, saying a word and then sinking into their dreams, with faces bent toward the earth. No doubt they were becoming young again. Around them lovers were turning over their sweethearts; there was a murmur of kisses and laughter; the warm odor of the girls arose in the freshness of the trodden grass. It was now forty-three years since Father Bonnemort had taken his wife behind the pit; she was a putter, so slight that he had placed her on a tram to embrace her at ease. Ah, those were fine days. And the two old men, shaking their heads, at last left each other, often without saying good night.

That evening, however, as Etienne arrived, Father Bonnemort, who was getting up from the beam to return to the settlement, said to Mouque:

"Good night, old man. I say, you knew Roussie?"

Mouque was silent for a moment, rocked his shoulders; then, returning to the house:

"Good night, good night, old man."

Etienne came and sat on the beam in his turn. His sadness was increasing, though he could not tell why. The old man, whose disappearing back he watched, recalled his arrival in the morning and the flood of words which the piercing wind had dragged from his silence. What wretchedness! And all these girls, worn out with fatigue, who were still stupid enough in the evening to fabricate little ones, to yield flesh for labor and suffering! It would never come to an end if they were always filling themselves with starvelings. Would it not be better if they were to shut up their bellies and press their thighs together, as at the approach of misfortune? Perhaps these gloomy ideas only stirred

confusedly in him because all the others at this hour were going about taking their pleasure in couples. The mild weather stifled him a little; occasional drops of rain fell on his feverish hands. Yes, they all came to it; it was something stronger than reason.

Just then, as Etienne remained seated motionless in the shadow, a couple who came down from Montsou rustled against him without seeing him as they entered the uneven Réquillart ground. The girl, certainly a virgin, was struggling and resisting with low-whispered supplications, while the lad in silence was pushing her toward the darkness of a corner of the shed, still upright, under which there were piles of old, moldy rope. It was Catherine and big Chaval. But Etienne had not recognized them in passing, and his eyes followed them; he was watching for the end of the story, touched by a sensuality which changed the course of his thoughts. Why should he interfere? When girls refuse it is because they like first to be forced.

On leaving the settlement of the Deux-Cent-Quarante, Catherine had gone to Montsou along the road. From the age of ten, since she had earned her living at the pit, she went about the country alone in the complete liberty of the colliers' families; and if no man had possessed her at fifteen it was owing to the tardy awakening of her puberty, the crisis of which had not yet arrived. When she was in front of the company's yards she crossed the road and entered a laundress's, where she was certain to find Mouquette, for the latter stayed there from morning till night among women who treated each other with coffee all round. But she was disappointed; Mouquette had just then been regaling them in her turn so thoroughly that she was not able to lend the half franc she had promised. To console her they vainly offered a glass of warm coffee. She was not even willing that her companion should borrow from another woman. An idea of economy had come to her, a sort of superstitious fear, the certainty that that ribbon would bring her bad luck if she were to buy it now.

She hastened to regain the road to the settlement and had reached the last houses of Montsou when a man at the door of the Piquette Estaminet called her:

"Eh! Catherine! Where are you off to so quick?"

It was lanky Chaval. She was vexed, not because he displeased her but because she was not inclined to joke.

"Come in and have a drink. A little glass of sweet, won't you?"

She refused politely; the night was coming on; they were expecting her at home. He had advanced and was entreating her in a low voice in the middle of the road. It had been his idea for a long time to persuade her to come up to the room which he occupied on the first story of the Piquette Estaminet, a fine room for a household, with a large bed. Did he frighten her, that she always refused? She laughed good-naturedly and said that she would come up someday when children didn't grow. Then one thing leading to another, she told him, without knowing how, about the blue ribbon which she had not been able to buy.

"But I'll pay for it," he exclaimed.

She blushed, feeling that it would be best to refuse again, but possessed by a strong desire to have the ribbon. The idea of a loan came back to her, and at last she accepted on condition that she should return to him what he spent on her. They began to joke again: it was agreed that if she did not sleep with him she should return him the money. But there was another difficulty when he talked of going to Maigrat's.

"No, not Maigrat's; Mother won't let me."

"Why? Is there any need to say where one goes? He has the best ribbons in Montsou."

When Maigrat saw lanky Chaval and Catherine coming to his shop like two lovers who were buying their engagement gifts, he became very red and exhibited his pieces of blue ribbon with the rage of a man who is being made fun of. Then when he had served the young people he planted himself at the door to watch them disappear in the twilight, and when his wife came to ask him a question in a timid voice, he fell on her, abusing her and exclaiming that he would make them repent someday, the filthy creatures who had no gratitude, when they ought all to be on the ground, licking his feet.

Lanky Chaval accompanied Catherine along the road. He walked beside her, swinging his arms; only he pushed her by the hip, conducting her without seeming to do so. She suddenly perceived that he had made her leave the pavement and that they were taking the narrow Réquillart road. But she had no time to be angry; his arm was already round her waist, and he was dazing her with a constant caress of words. How stupid she was to be afraid! Did he want to hurt such a little darling, who was as soft as silk, so tender that he could have devoured her? And he breathed behind her ear, in her neck, so that a shudder passed over the skin of her whole body. She felt stifled and had nothing to reply. It was true that he seemed to love her. On Saturday evenings, after having blown out the candle, she had asked herself what would happen if he were to take her in this way; then on going to sleep she had dreamed that she would no longer refuse, quite overcome by pleasure. Why, then, at the same idea today did she feel repugnance and something like regret? While he was tickling her neck with his mustache, so softly that she closed her eyes, the shadow of another man, of the lad she had seen that morning, passed over the darkness of her closed eyelids.

Catherine suddenly looked around her. Chaval had conducted her into the ruins of Réquillart, and she recoiled, shuddering, from the darkness of the fallen shed.

"Oh no! Oh no!" she murmured. "Please let me go!"

The fear of the male had taken hold of her, that fear which stiffens the muscles in an impulse of defense, even when girls are willing and feel the conquering approach of man. Her virginity, which had nothing to learn, took fright as at a threatening blow, a wound of which she feared the unknown pain.

"No, no! I don't want to! I tell you that I am too young. It's true! Another time, when I am quite grown up."

He growled in a low voice:

"Stupid! There's nothing to fear. What does that matter?"

But without speaking more he had seized her solidly and pushed her beneath the shed, and she fell on her back on the old ropes; she ceased to protest, yielding to the male before her time with that hereditary submission which from childhood had thrown down in the open air all the girls of her race. Her frightened stammering grew faint, and only the ardent breath of the man was heard.

Etienne, however, had listened without moving. Another who was taking the leap! And now that he had seen the comedy he got up, overcome by uneasiness, by a kind of jealous excitement in which there was a touch of anger. He no longer restrained himself; he stepped over the beams, for those two were too much occupied now to be disturbed. He was surprised, therefore, when he had gone a hundred paces along the path to find that they were already standing up and that they appeared, like himself, to be returning to the settlement. The man again had his arm round the girl's waist and was squeezing her with an air of gratitude, still speaking in her neck, and it was she who seemed in a hurry, anxious to return quickly and annoyed at the delay.

Then Etienne was tormented by the desire to see their faces. It was foolish, and he hastened his steps so as not to yield to it, but his feet slackened of their own accord, and at the first lamppost he concealed himself in the shade. He was petrified by horror when he recognized Catherine and lanky Chaval. He hesitated at first; was it indeed she, that young girl in the coarse blue dress with that bonnet? Was that the urchin whom he had seen in breeches, with her head in the canvas cap? That was why she could pass so near him without his recognizing her. But he no longer doubted; he had seen her eyes again, with their greenish limpidity of spring water, so clear and so deep. What a wench! And he experienced a furious desire to avenge himself on her with contempt, without any motive. Besides, he did not like her as a girl; she was frightful.

Catherine and Chaval had passed him slowly. They did not know that they were watched. He held her to kiss her behind the ear, and she began to slacken her steps beneath his caresses, which made her laugh. Left behind, Etienne was obliged to follow them, irritated because they barred the road and because in spite of himself he had to witness these things which exasperated him. It was true then, what she had sworn to him in the morning: she was not anyone's mistress; and he, who had not believed her, who had deprived himself of her in order not to act like the other and who had let her be taken beneath his nose, pushing his stupidity so far as to be dirtily amused at seeing them! It made him mad! He clenched his hands; he could have devoured that man in one of those impulses to kill in which he saw everything red.

The walk lasted for half an hour. When Chaval and Catherine approached the Voreux they slackened their pace still more; they stopped twice beside the canal, three times along the pit bank, very cheerful now and occupied with little tender games. Etienne was obliged to stop also when they stopped, for fear of being perceived. He endeavored to feel nothing but a brutal regret: that would teach him to treat girls with consideration through being well brought up! Then after passing the Voreux and at last free to go and dine at Rasseneur's, he continued to follow them, accompanying them to the settlement, where he

remained standing in the shade for a quarter of an hour, waiting until Chaval left Catherine to enter her home. And when he was quite sure that they were no longer together he set off walking afresh, going very far along the Marchiennes road, stamping and thinking of nothing, too stifled and too sad to shut himself up in a room.

It was not until an hour later, toward nine o'clock, that Etienne again passed the settlement, saying to himself that he must eat and sleep if he was to be up again at four o'clock in the morning. The village was already asleep and looked quite black in the night. Not a gleam shone from the closed shutters; the house fronts slept with the heavy sleep of snoring barracks. Only a cat escaped through the empty gardens. It was the end of the day, the collapse of workers falling from the table to the bed, overcome with weariness and food.

At Rasseneur's, in the lighted room, an enginemaster and two dayworkers were drinking. But before going in Etienne stopped to throw one last glance into the darkness. He saw again the same black immensity as in the morning when he had arrived in the wind. Before him the Voreux was crouching with its air of an evil beast, its dimness pricked with a few lantern lights. The three braziers of the bank were burning in the air like bloody moons, now and then showing the vast silhouettes of Father Bonnemort and his yellow horse. And beyond, in the flat plain, shade had submerged everything, Montsou, Marchiennes, the forest of Vandame, the immense sea of beetroot and of wheat, in which there only shone, like distant lighthouses, the blue fires of the blast furnaces and the red fires of the coke ovens. Gradually the night came on; the rain was now falling slowly, continuously, burying this void in its monotonous streaming. Only one voice was still heard, the thick, slow respiration of the pumping engine, breathing both by day and by night.

PART THREE

CHAPTER I

ON THE NEXT DAY and the days that followed Etienne continued his work at the pit. He grew accustomed to it; his existence became regulated by this labor and to these new habits which had seemed so hard to him at first. Only one episode interrupted the monotony of the first fortnight: a slight fever which kept him in bed for forty-eight hours with aching limbs and throbbing head, dreaming in a state of semidelirium that he was pushing his tram in a passage that was so narrow that his body would not pass through. It was simply the exhaustion of his apprenticeship, an excess of fatigue from which he quickly recovered.

And days followed days, until weeks and months had slipped by. Now, like his mates, he got up at three o'clock, drank his coffee and carried off the double slice of bread and butter which Mme Rasseneur had prepared for him the evening before. Regularly as he went every morning to the pit he met old

Bonnemort, who was going home to sleep, and on leaving in the afternoon he crossed Bouteloup, who was going to his task. He had his cap, his breeches and canvas jacket, and he shivered and warmed his back in the shed before the large fire. Then came the waiting with naked feet in the receiving room, swept by furious currents of air. But the engine with its great steel limbs starred with copper, shining up above in the shade, no longer attracted his attention, or the cables which flew by with the black and silent motion of a nocturnal bird, or the cages rising and plunging unceasingly in the midst of the noise of signals, of shouted orders, of trams shaking the metal floor. His lamp burned badly. That confounded lampman could not have cleaned it, and it only revived when Mouquet sent them all packing and roguishly smacked the girls' flanks. The cage was unfastened and fell like a stone to the bottom of a hole without causing him even to lift his head to see the daylight vanish. He never thought of a possible fall; he felt himself at home as he sank into the darkness beneath the falling rain. Below at the pit eye, when Pierron had unloaded them with his air of hypocritical mildness, there was always the same tramping as of a flock, the yardmen each going away to his cutting with trailing steps. He now knew the mine galleries better than the streets of Montsou; he knew where he had to turn, where he had to stoop and where he had to avoid a puddle. He had grown so accustomed to these two kilometers beneath the earth that he could have traversed them without a lamp, with his hands in his pockets. And every time the same meetings took place: a captain lighting up the faces of the passing workmen, Father Mouque leading a horse, Bébert conducting the snorting Bataille, Jeanlin running behind the train to close the ventilation doors and big Mouquette and lean Lydie pushing their trams.

After a time, also, Etienne suffered much less from the damp and closeness of the cutting. The chimney or ascending passage seemed to him more convenient for climbing up, as if he had melted and could pass through cracks where before he would not have risked a hand. He breathed the coal dust without difficulty, saw clearly in the obscurity and sweated tranquilly, having grown accustomed to the sensation of wet garments on his body from morning to night. Besides, he no longer spent his energy recklessly; he had gained skill so rapidly that he astonished the whole stall. In three weeks he was named among the best putters in the pit; no one pushed a tram more rapidly to the upbrow or loaded it afterward so correctly. His small figure allowed him to slip about everywhere, and though his arms were as delicate and white as a woman's, they seemed to be made of iron beneath the smooth skin, so vigorously did they perform their task. He never complained—out of pride, no doubt—even when he was panting with fatigue. The only thing they had against him was that he could not take a joke and grew angry as soon as anyone trod on his toes. In all other respects he was looked upon as a real miner, reduced beneath this pressure of habit, little by little, to a machine.

Maheu regarded Etienne with special friendship, for he respected work that was well done. Then, like the others, he felt that this lad had more education than himself; he saw him read, write and draw little plans; he heard him talking of things of which he himself did not know even the existence. This caused

him no astonishment, for miners are rough fellows who have thicker heads than enginemen, but he was surprised at the courage of this little chap and at the cheerful way he had bitten into the coal to avoid dying of hunger. He had never met a workman who grew accustomed to it so quickly. So when hewing was urgent and he did not wish to disturb a pikeman, he gave the timbering over to the young man, being sure of the neatness and solidity of his work. The bosses were always bothering him about that damned planking question; he feared every hour the appearance of the engineer Négrel, followed by Dansaert, shouting, discussing, ordering everything to be done over again, and he remarked that his putter's timbering gave greater satisfaction to these gentlemen, in spite of their air of never being pleased with anything and their repeated assertions that the company would one day or another take radical measures. Things dragged on; a deep discontent was fomenting in the pit, and Maheu himself, in spite of his calmness, was beginning to clench his fists.

There was at first some rivalry between Zacharie and Etienne. One evening they were even coming to blows. But the former, a good lad, though careless of everything but his own pleasure, was quickly appeased by the friendly offer of a glass and soon yielded to the superiority of the newcomer. Levaque was also on good terms with him, talking politics with the putter, who, as he said, had his own ideas. The only one of the men in whom he felt a deep hostility was lanky Chaval: not that they were cool toward each other, for, on the contrary, they had become companions; only when they joked their eyes seemed to devour each other. Catherine continued to move among them as a tired, resigned girl, bending her back, pushing her tram, always good-natured with her companion in the putting, who aided her in his turn, and submissive to the wishes of her lover, whose caresses she now received openly. It was an accepted situation, a recognized domestic arrangement to which the family itself closed its eyes to such a degree that Chaval every evening led away the putter behind the pit bank, then brought her back to her parents' door, where he finally embraced her before the whole settlement. Etienne, who believed that he had reconciled himself to the situation, often teased her about these walks, making crude remarks by way of joke, as lads and girls will at the bottom of the cuttings; and she replied in the same tone, telling in a swaggering way what her lover had done to her, yet disturbed and growing pale when the young man's eyes chanced to meet hers. Then both would turn away their heads, not speaking again, perhaps for an hour, looking as if they hated each other because of something buried within them and which they could never explain to each other.

The spring had come. On emerging from the pit one day Etienne had received in his face a warm April breeze, a good odor of young earth, of tender greenness, of large open air; and now every time he came up the spring smelled sweeter, warmed him more, after his ten hours of labor in the eternal winter at the bottom, in the midst of that damp darkness which no summer had ever dissipated. The days grew longer and longer; at last, in May, he went down at sunrise when a vermilion sky lit up the Voreux with a mist of dawn in which the white vapor of the pumping engine became rose-colored.

There was no more shivering; a warm breath blew across the plain, while the larks sang far above. Then at three o'clock he was dazzled by the now-burning sun which set fire to the horizon and reddened the bricks beneath the filth of the coal. In June the wheat was already high, of a blue green, which contrasted with the black green of the beetroots. It was an endless vista undulating beneath the slightest breeze, and he saw it spread and grow from day to day and was sometimes surprised, as if he had found it in the evening more swollen with verdure than it had been in the morning. The poplars along the canal were putting on their plumes of leaves. Grass was invading the pit bank; flowers were covering the meadows; a whole life was germinating and pushing up from this earth, beneath which he was groaning in misery and fatigue.

When Etienne now went for a walk in the evening he no longer startled lovers behind the pit bank. He could follow their track in the wheat and divine their wanton birds' nests by eddies among the yellowing blades and the great red poppies. Zacharie and Philomène came back to it out of old domestic habit; Mother Brûlé, always on Lydie's heels, was constantly hunting her out with Jeanlin, buried so deeply together that one had to tread on them before they made up their minds to get up; and as to Mouquette, she lay about everywhere—one could not cross a field without seeing her head plunge down while only her feet emerged as she lay at full length. But all these were quite free; the young man found nothing guilty there except on the evenings when he met Catherine and Chaval. Twice he saw them on his approach tumble down in the midst of a field, where the motionless stalks afterward remained dead. Another time, as he was going along a narrow path, Catherine's clear eyes appeared before him, level with the wheat, and immediately sank. Then the immense plain seemed to him too small, and he preferred to pass the evening at Rasseneur's, in the *Avantage*.

"Give me a glass, Madame Rasseneur. No, I'm not going out tonight; my legs are too stiff."

And he turned toward a comrade, who always sat at the bottom table with his head against the wall.

"Souvarine, won't you have one?"

"No, thanks; nothing."

Etienne had become acquainted with Souvarine through living there side by side. He was an engineman at the Voreux and occupied the furnished room upstairs next to his own. He must have been about thirty years old, fair and slender, with a delicate face framed by thick hair and a slight beard. His white pointed teeth, his thin mouth and nose, with his rosy complexion, gave him a girlish appearance, an air of obstinate gentleness, across which the gray reflection of his steely eyes threw savage gleams. In his poor workman's room there was nothing but a box of papers and books. He was a Russian and never spoke of himself, so that many stories were afloat concerning him. The colliers, who are very suspicious with strangers, guessing from his small middle-class hands that he belonged to another caste, had at first imagined a romance, some assassination, and that he was escaping punishment. But then he had behaved in such a fraternal way with them, without any pride, distributing

to the youngsters of the settlement all the sous in his pockets, that they now accepted him, reassured by the term "political refugee" which circulated about him—a vague term, in which they saw an excuse even for crime and, as it were, a companionship in suffering.

During the first weeks Etienne had found him timid and reserved, so that he only discovered his history later on. Souvarine was the latest born of a noble family in the government of Toula. At Saint Petersburg, where he studied medicine, the social enthusiasm which then carried away all the youth in Russia had decided him to learn a manual trade, that of a mechanic, so that he could mix with the people, in order to know them and help them as a brother. And it was by this trade that he was now living after having fled, in consequence of an unsuccessful attempt against the czar's life; for a month he had lived in a fruiterer's cellar, hollowing out a mine underneath the road and charging bombs, with the constant risk of being blown up with the house. Renounced by his family, without money, expelled from the French workshops as a stranger who was regarded as a spy, he was dying of starvation when the Montsou Company had at last taken him on at a moment of pressure. For a year he had labored there as a good, sober, silent workman, doing daywork one week and nightwork the next week, so regularly that the masters referred to him as an example to the others.

"Are you never thirsty?" said Etienne to him, laughing.

And he replied with his gentle voice, almost without an accent:

"I am thirsty when I eat."

His companion also joked him about the girls, declaring that he had seen him with a putter in the wheat on the Bas-de-Soie side. Then he shrugged his shoulders with tranquil indifference. What should he do with a putter? Woman was for him a boy, a comrade, when she had the fraternal feeling and the courage of a man. What was the good of having a possible act of cowardice on one's conscience? He desired no bond, either woman or friend; he would be master of his own life and those of others.

Every evening toward nine o'clock, when the inn was emptying, Etienne remained thus, talking with Souvarine. He drank his beer in small sips, while the engineman smoked constant cigarettes, of which the tobacco had at last reddened his slender fingers. His vague mystic's eyes followed the smoke in the midst of a dream; his left hand sought occupation by nervously twitching, and he usually ended by installing a tame rabbit on his knees, a large doe with young, who lived at liberty in the house. This rabbit, which he had named Poland, had grown to worship him; she would come and smell his trousers, fawn on him and scratch him with her paws until he took her up like a child. Then lying in a heap against him, she would close her eyes, and without growing tired, with an unconscious caressing gesture, he would pass his hand over her gray silky fur, calmed by that warm living softness.

"You know I have had a letter from Pluchart," said Etienne one evening.

Only Rasseneur was there. The last client had departed for the settlement, which was now going to bed.

"Ah!" exclaimed the innkeeper, standing up before his two lodgers. "How are things going with Pluchart?"

During the last two months Etienne had kept up a constant correspondence with the Lille mechanic, to whom he had told his Montsou engagement and who was now indoctrinating him, having been struck by the propaganda which might be carried on among the miners.

"The association is getting on very well. It seems that they are coming in from all sides."

"What have you got to say, eh, about their society?" asked Rasseneur of Souvarine.

The latter, who was softly scratching Poland's head, blew out a puff of smoke and muttered with his tranquil air:

"More foolery!"

But Etienne grew enthusiastic. A predisposition for revolt was throwing him, in the first illusions of his ignorance, into the struggle of labor against capital. It was the International Association of Workers that they were concerned with, that famous International which had just been founded in London. Was not that a superb effort, a campaign in which justice would at last triumph? No more frontiers, the workers of the whole world rising and uniting to assure to the laborer the bread that he had earned. And what a simple and great organization! Below the section which represents the commune, then the federation which groups the sections of the same province, then the nation and then, at last, humanity incarnated in a general council in which each nation was represented by a corresponding secretary. In six months it would conquer the world and would be able to dictate laws to the masters should they prove obstinate.

"Foolery!" repeated Souvarine. "Your Karl Marx is still only thinking about letting natural forces act. No politics, no conspiracies, is it not so? Everything in the light of day and simply to raise wages. Don't bother me with your evolution! Set fire to the four corners of the town; mow down the people; level everything, and when there is nothing more of this rotten world left standing perhaps a better one will grow up in its place."

Etienne began to laugh. He did not always take in his comrade's sayings; this theory of destruction seemed to him an affectation. Rasseneur, who was still more practical, like a man of solid common sense, did not condescend to get angry. He only wanted to have things clear.

"Then what? Are you going to try and create a section at Montsou?"

This was what was desired by Pluchart, who was secretary to the Federation of the Nord. He insisted especially on the services which the association would render to the miners should they go out on strike. Etienne believed that a strike was imminent: this timbering business would turn out badly; any further demands on the part of the company would cause all rebellion in the pits.

"It's the subscriptions that's the nuisance," Rasseneur declared in a judicial tone. "Half a franc a year for the general fund, two francs for the section; it looks like nothing, but I bet that many will refuse to give it."

"All the more," added Etienne, "because we must first have here a provident fund, which we can use, if need be, as an emergency fund. No matter, it is time to think about these things. I am ready if the others are ready."

There was silence. The petroleum lamp smoked on the counter. Through the large open door they could distinctly hear the shovel of a stoker at the Voreux stoking the engine.

"Everything is so dear!" began Mme Rasseneur, who had entered and was listening with gloomy air, as if she had grown up in her everlasting black dress. "When I tell you that I've paid twenty-two sous for eggs it will have to burst up."

All three men this time were of the same opinion. They spoke one after the other in a despairing voice, giving expression to their complaints. The workers could not hold out; the Revolution had only aggravated their wretchedness; only the bourgeois had grown fat since '89, so greedily that they had not even left the bottom of the plates to lick. Who could say that the workers had had their reasonable share in the extraordinary increase of wealth and comfort during the last hundred years? They had made fun of them by declaring them free. Yes, free to starve, a freedom of which they fully availed themselves. It put no bread into your cupboard to go and vote for fine fellows who went away and enjoyed themselves, thinking no more of the wretched voters than of their old boots. No! One way or another it would have to come to an end, either quietly by laws, by an understanding in good fellowship, or like savages by burning everything and devouring one another. Even if they never saw it their children would certainly see it, for the century could not come to an end without another revolution, that of the workers this time, a general hustling which would cleanse society from top to bottom and rebuild it with more cleanliness and justice.

"It will have to burst up," Mme Rasseneur repeated energetically.

"Yes, yes," they all three cried. "It will have to burst up." Souvarine was now tickling Poland's ears, and her nose was curling with pleasure. He said in a low voice, with abstracted gaze, as if to himself:

"Raise wages—how can you? They're fixed by an iron law to the smallest possible sum, just the sum necessary to allow the workers to eat dry bread and get children. If they fall too low the workers die, and the demand for new men makes them rise. If they rise too high more men come, and they fall. It is the balance of empty bellies, a sentence to a perpetual prison of hunger."

When he thus forgot himself, entering into the questions that stir an educated Socialist, Etienne and Rasseneur became restless, disturbed by his despairing statements, which they were unable to answer.

"Do you understand?" he said again, gazing at them with his habitual calmness. "We must destroy everything, or hunger will reappear. Yes, anarchy and nothing more; the earth washed in blood and purified by fire! Then we shall see!"

"Monsieur is quite right," said Mme Rasseneur, who, in her revolutionary violence, was always very polite.

Etienne, in despair at his ignorance, would argue no longer. He rose, remarking:

"Let's go to bed. All this won't save one from getting up at three o'clock."

Souvarine, having blown away the cigarette end which was sticking to his lips, was already gently lifting the big rabbit beneath the belly to place it on the ground. Rasseneur was shutting up the house. They separated in silence with buzzing ears, as if their heads had swollen with the grave questions they had been discussing.

And every evening there were similar conversations in the bare room around the single glass which Etienne took an hour to empty. A crowd of obscure ideas, asleep within him, were stirring and expanding. Especially consumed by the need of knowledge, he had long hesitated to borrow books from his neighbor, who unfortunately only possessed German and Russian works. At last he had borrowed a French book on co-operative societies—mere foolery, said Souvarine, and he also regularly read a newspaper which the latter received, the *Combat*, an anarchist journal published at Geneva. In other respects, notwithstanding their daily relations, he found him as reserved as ever, with his air of camping in life, without interests or feelings or possessions of any kind.

Toward the first days of July Etienne's situation began to improve. In the midst of this monotonous life, always beginning over again, an accident had occurred. The stalls in the Guillaume seam had come across a shifting of the strata, a general disturbance in the layers, which certainly announced that they were approaching a fault; and, in fact, they soon came across this fault which the engineers, in spite of considerable knowledge of the soil, were still ignorant of. This upset the pit; nothing was talked of but the lost seam, which was to be found, no doubt, lower down on the other side of the fault. The old miners were already expanding their nostrils, like good dogs, in a chase for coal. But meanwhile the hewers could not stand with folded arms, and placards announced that the company would put up new workings to auction.

Maheu, on coming out one day, accompanied Etienne and offered to take him on as a pikeman in his working, in place of Levaque, who had gone to another yard. The matter had already been arranged with the head captain and the engineer, who were very pleased with the young man. So Etienne merely had to accept this rapid promotion, glad of the growing esteem in which Maheu held him.

In the evening they returned together to the pit to take note of the placards. The cuttings put up to auction were in the Filonnière seam in the north gallery of the Voreux. They did not seem very advantageous, and the miner shook his head when the young man read out the conditions. On the following day when they had gone down, he took him to see the seam and showed him how far away it was from the pit eye, the crumbly nature of the earth, the thinness and hardness of the coal. But if they were to eat they would have to work. So on the following Sunday they went to the auction, which took place in the shed and was presided over by the engineer of the pit, assisted by the head captain in the absence of the divisional engineer. From five to six hundred miners were there in front of the little platform, which was placed in the cor-

ner, and the bidding went on so rapidly that one only heard a deep tumult of voices, of shouted figures drowned by other figures.

For a moment Maheu feared that he would not be able to obtain one of the forty workings offered by the company. All the rivals went lower, disquieted by the rumors of a crisis and the panic of a lockout. Négrel, the engineer, did not hurry in the face of this panic and allowed the offers to fall to the lowest possible figures, while Dansaert, anxious to push matters still further, lied with regard to the quality of the workings. In order to get his fifty meters Maheu struggled with a comrade, who was also obstinate; in turn they each took off a centime from the tram, and if he conquered in the end it was only by lowering the wage to such an extent that the captain, Richomme, who was standing behind him, muttered between his teeth and pushed him with the elbow, growling that he could never do it at that price.

When they came out Etienne was swearing. And he broke out before Chaval, who was returning from the wheat fields in company with Catherine, amusing himself while his father-in-law was absorbed in serious business.

"By God!" he exclaimed. "It's simply slaughter! Today it is the worker who is forced to devour the worker!"

Chaval was furious. He would never have lowered it, he wouldn't! And Zacharie, who had come out of curiosity, declared that it was disgusting. But Etienne with a violent gesture silenced them.

"It will end someday; we shall be the masters!"

Maheu, who had been mute since the auction, appeared to wake up. He repeated:

"Masters! Ah! Bad luck! And not soon over either."

CHAPTER II

IT WAS Montsou Feast Day, the last Sunday in July. Since Saturday evening the good housekeepers of the settlement had deluged their parlors with water, throwing bucketfuls over the flags and against the walls, and the floor was not yet dry, in spite of the white sand which had been sown over it, an expensive luxury for the purses of the poor. But the day promised to be very warm; it was one of those heavy skies threatening storm, which in summer stifle this flat, bare country of the *nord*.

Sunday upset the hours for rising, even among the Maheus. While the father, after five o'clock, grew weary of his bed and dressed himself, the children lay in bed until nine. On this day Maheu went to smoke a pipe in his garden and then came back to eat his bread and butter alone while waiting. He thus passed the morning in a random manner; he mended the tub, which leaked; stuck up beneath the clock a portrait of the prince imperial, which had been given to the little ones. However, the others came down one by one. Father Bonnemort had taken a chair outside to sit in the sun, while the mother and Alzire had at once set about cooking. Catherine appeared, pushing before her Lénore and Henri, whom she had just dressed. Eleven o'clock struck, and the

odor of the rabbit, which was boiling with potatoes, was already filling the house when Zacharie and Jeanlin came down last, still yawning and with their swollen eyes.

The settlement was now in a flutter, excited by the feast day and in expectation of dinner, which was being hastened for the departure in bands to Montsou. Troops of children were rushing about. Men in their shirt sleeves were trailing their old shoes, with the lazy gait of days of rest. Windows and doors, opened wide in the fine weather, gave glimpses of rows of parlors, which were filled with movement and shouts and the chatter of families. And from one end to the other of the frontages there was a smell of rabbit, a rich kitchen smell which on this day struggled with the inveterate odor of fried onion.

The Maheus dined at midday. They made little noise in the midst of the chatter from door to door, in the coming and going of women in a constant rumor of appeals and replies, of objects borrowed, of youngsters hunted away or brought back with a slap. Besides, they had not been on good terms during the last three weeks with their neighbors the Levaques, on the subject of the marriage of Zacharie and Philomène. The men passed the time of day, but the women pretended not to know each other. This quarrel had strengthened the relations with Pierronne; only Pierronne had left Pierron and Lydie with her mother and set out early in the morning to spend the day with a cousin at Marchiennes, and they joked, for they knew this cousin; she had a mustache and was head captain on the Voreux. Maheude declared that it was not proper to leave one's family on a feast-day Sunday.

Besides the rabbit with potatoes, a rabbit which had been fattening in the shed for a month, the Maheus had meat soup and beef. The fortnight's wages had just fallen due the day before. They could not recollect such a spread. Even at the last Sainte Barbe's Day, the fete of the miners when they do nothing for three days, the rabbit had not been so fat or so tender. So the ten pairs of jaws, from little Estelle, whose teeth were beginning to appear, to old Bonnemort, who was losing his, worked so heartily that the bones themselves disappeared. The meat was good, but they could not digest it well; they saw it too seldom. Everything disappeared; there only remained a piece of boiled beef for the evening. They could add bread and butter if they were hungry.

Jeanlin went out first. Bébert was waiting for him behind the school, and they prowled about for a long time before they were able to entice away Lydie, whom Brûlé, who had decided not to go out, was trying to keep with her. When she perceived that the child had fled she shouted and brandished her lean arms, while Pierron, annoyed at the disturbance, strolled quietly away with the air of a husband who can amuse himself with a good conscience, knowing that his wife also has her little amusements.

Old Bonnemort set out at last, and Maheu decided to have a little fresh air after asking Maheude if she would come and join him down below. No, she couldn't at all, it was nothing but drudgery with the little ones, but perhaps she would, all the same; she would think about it: they could easily find each other. When he got outside he hesitated, then he went into the neighbors' to see if Levaque was ready. There he found Zacharie, who was waiting

for Philomène, and the Levaque woman started again on that everlasting subject of marriage, saying that she was being made fun of and that she would have an explanation with Maheude once and for all. Was life worth living when one had to keep one's daughter's fatherless children while she went off with her lover? Philomène quietly finished putting on her bonnet, and Zacharie took her off, saying that he was quite willing if his mother was willing. As Levaque had already gone, Maheu referred his angry neighbor to his wife and hastened to depart. Bouteloup, who was finishing a fragment of cheese with both elbows on the table, obstinately refused the friendly offer of a glass. He would stay in the house like a good husband.

Gradually the settlement was emptied; all the men went off one behind the other, while the girls, watching at the doors, set out from the opposite side on the arms of their lovers. As her father turned the corner of the church Catherine perceived Chaval, and, hastening to join him, they took together the Montsou road. And the mother remained alone in the midst of her scattered children, without strength to leave her chair, where she was pouring out a second glass of boiling coffee, which she drank in little sips. In the settlement there were only the women left, inviting each other to finish the dregs of the coffeepots around the tables that were still warm and greasy with the dinner.

Maheu had guessed that Levaque was at the Avantage, and he slowly went down to Rasseneur's. In fact, behind the bar, in the little garden shut in by a hedge, Levaque was having a game of skittles with some mates. Standing by and not playing, Father Bonnemort and old Mouque were following the ball, so absorbed that they even forgot to nudge each other with their elbows. A burning sun struck down on them perpendicularly; there was only one streak of shade by the side of the inn, and Étienne was there, drinking his glass before a table, annoyed because Souvarine had just left him to go up to his room. Nearly every Sunday the engineman shut himself up to write or to read.

"Will you have a game?" asked Levaque of Maheu.

But he refused: it was too hot; he was already dying of thirst.

"Rasseneur," called Étienne, "bring a glass, will you?"

And turning toward Maheu:

"I'll stand it, you know."

They now all treated each other familiarly. Rasseneur did not hurry himself, and Mme Rasseneur at last brought some lukewarm beer. The young man had lowered his voice to complain about the house: they were worthy people, certainly, people with good ideas, but the beer was worthless and the soup abominable! He would have changed his lodgings ten times over, only the thought of the walk from Montsou held him back. One day or another he would go and live with some family at the settlement.

"Sure enough!" said Maheu in his slow voice. "Sure enough; you would be better in a family."

But shouts now broke out. Levaque had overthrown all the skittles at one stroke. Mouque and Bonnemort, with their faces toward the ground, in the midst of the tumult preserved a silence of profound approbation. And the joy

at this stroke found vent in jokes, especially when the players perceived Mouquette's radiant face behind the hedge. She had been prowling about there for an hour and at last ventured to come near on hearing the laughter.

"What! Are you alone?" shouted Levaque. "Where are your sweethearts?"

"My sweethearts! I've stabled them," she replied with a fine, impudent gaiety. "I'm looking for one."

They all offered themselves, throwing coarse chaff at her. She refused with a gesture and laughed louder, playing the fine lady. Besides, her father was assisting at the game without even taking his eyes from the fallen skittles.

"Ah!" Levaque went on, throwing a look toward Etienne. "One can tell where you're casting sheep's eyes, my girl! You'll have to take him by force."

Then Etienne looked amused. It was, in fact, around him that the putter was revolving. And he refused, amused, indeed, but without having the least desire for her. She remained planted behind the hedge for some minutes longer, looking at him with large fixed eyes; then she slowly went away, and her face suddenly became serious, as if she were overcome by the powerful sun.

In a low voice Etienne was again giving long explanations to Maheu regarding the necessity for the Montsou miners to establish a provident fund. "Since the company professes to leave us free," he repeated, "what is there to fear? We only have their pensions, and they distribute them according to their own idea, from the moment when they hold back no pay. Well, it will be prudent to form, outside their good pleasure, an association of mutual help on which we can count at least in cases of immediate need."

And he gave details and discussed the organization, promising to undertake the labor of it.

"I am willing enough," said Maheu, at last convinced. "But there are the others; get them to make up their minds."

Levaque had won, and they left the skittles to empty their glasses. But Maheu refused to drink a second glass; he would see later on; the day was not yet done. He was thinking about Pierron. Where could he be? No doubt at the L'Enfant Estaminet. And having persuaded Etienne and Levaque, the three set out for Montsou, at the same moment as a new band took possession of the skittles at the Avantage.

On the road they had to pause at the Casimir Bar and then at the Estaminet du Progrès. Comrades called them through the open doors, and there was no way of refusing. Each time it was a glass, two if they were polite enough to return the invitation. They remained there ten minutes, exchanging a few words, and then began again a little farther on, knowing the beer with which they could fill themselves without any other discomfort than having to piss it out again in the same measure, as clear as rock water. At the L'Enfant Estaminet they came right upon Pierron, who was finishing his second glass and who, in order not to refuse to touch glasses, swallowed a third. They naturally drank theirs also. Now there were four of them, and they set out to see if Zacharie was not at the Estaminet Tison. It was empty, and they called for a glass in order to wait for him a moment. Then they thought of the Estaminet Saint-Eloi and accepted there a round from Captain Richomme. Then they

rambled from bar to bar without any pretext, simply saying that they were having a stroll.

"We must go to the Volcan!" suddenly said Levaque, who was getting excited.

The others began to laugh and hesitated. Then they accompanied their comrade in the midst of the growing crowd. In the long narrow room of the Volcan, on a platform raised at the end, five singers, the scum of the Lille prostitutes, were walking about, low-necked and with monstrous gestures, and the customers gave ten sous when they desired to have one behind the stage. There was especially a number of putters and landers, even trammers of fourteen, all the youth of the pit, drinking more gin than beer. A few old miners also ventured there and the worst husbands of the settlements, those whose households were falling into ruin.

As soon as the band was seated round a little table Etienne took possession of Levaque to explain to him his idea of the provident fund. Like all new converts who have found a mission, he had become an obstinate propagandist.

"Every member," he repeated, "could easily pay in twenty sous a month. As these twenty sous accumulated they would form a nice little sum in twenty-four years, and when one has money one is strong, eh? for everything that turns up. Eh, what do you say to it?"

"I've nothing to say against it," replied Levaque with an abstracted air. "We will talk about it."

He was excited by an enormous blonde and determined to remain behind when Maheu and Pierron, after drinking their glasses, set out without waiting for a second song.

Outside Etienne, who had gone with them, found Monquette, who seemed to be following them. She was always there, looking at him with her large fixed eyes, laughing her good-natured laugh, as if to say: "Are you willing?" The young man joked and shrugged his shoulders. Then with a gesture of anger she was lost in the crowd.

"Where, then, is Chaval?" asked Pierron.

"True!" said Maheu. "He must surely be at Piquette's. Let us go to Piquette's."

But as they all three arrived at the Piquette Estaminet sounds of a quarrel arrested them at the door; Zacharie with his fist was threatening a thick-set, phlegmatic Walloon nail maker, while Chaval, with his hands in his pockets, was looking on.

"Hullo! There's Chaval," said Maheu quietly. "He is with Catherine."

For five long hours the putter and her lover had been walking about the fair. It was along the Montsou road, that wide road with low, bedaubed houses descending like a braid, a crowd of people disporting in the sun, like a trail of ants, lost in the flat, bare plain. The eternal black mud had dried; a black dust was rising and floating about like a storm cloud.

On both sides the public places were crowded; there were rows of tables to the street, where stood a double rank of hucksters at stalls in the open air,

selling neck handkerchiefs and looking glasses for the girls, knives and caps for the lads, to say nothing of sweetmeats, sugarplums and biscuits. In front of the church archery was going on. Opposite the yards they were playing at bowls. At the corner of the Joiselle road, beside the administration buildings, in a spot enclosed by fences, crowds were watching a cockfight, two large red cocks, armed with steel spurs and torn-open, bleeding breasts. Farther on, at Maigrat's, aprons and trousers were being won at billiards. And there were long silences; the crowd drank and stuffed itself without a sound; a mute indigestion of beer and fried potatoes was expanding in the great heat, still further increased by the frying pans bubbling in the open air.

Chaval bought a looking glass for nineteen sous and a handkerchief for three francs to give to Catherine. At every turn they met Mouque and Bonnemort, who had come to the fair and who, with their stiff legs, went from side to side in a reflective manner. Another meeting made them angry; they caught sight of Jeanlin persuading Bébert and Lydie to steal bottles of gin from an extemporized bar installed at the edge of an open piece of ground. Catherine succeeded in boxing her brother's ears; the little girl had already run away with a bottle. These imps of Satan would certainly end in a prison. Then as they arrived before another bar, the Tête-Coupée, it occurred to Chaval to take his sweetheart in to a competition of chaffinches which had been announced on the door for the past week. Fifteen nail makers from the Marchiennes nailworks had responded to the appeal, each with a dozen cages, and the gloomy little cages in which the blinded finches sat motionless were already fastened to a paling in the innyard. It was a question as to which, in the course of an hour, should repeat the phrase of its song the greatest number of times. Each nail maker with a slate stood near his cages to mark, watching his neighbors and watched by them. And the chaffinches had begun, the *chichouïeux* with the deeper note, the *batissecouics* with their shriller note, all at first timid and only risking a rare phrase, then, excited by each other's songs, increasing the pace, then at last carried away by such a rage of rivalry that they would even fall dead. The nail makers violently whipped them on with their voices, shouting out to them in Walloon to sing more, still more, yet a little more, while the spectators, about a hundred people, stood by in mute fascination in the midst of this infernal music of a hundred and eighty chaffinches, all repeating the same cadence out of time. It was a *batissecouic* which gained the first prize, a metal coffeepot.

Catherine and Chaval were there when Zacharie and Philomène entered. They shook hands, and all stayed together. But suddenly Zacharie became angry, for he discovered that a nail maker who had come in with his mates out of curiosity was pinching his sister's thigh. She blushed and tried to make him be silent, trembling at the idea that all these nail makers would throw themselves on Chaval and kill him if he did not like her to be pinched. She had felt the pinch but said nothing out of prudence. Her lover, however, merely made a grimace, and as they all four now went out the affair seemed to be finished. But hardly had they entered Piquette's to drink a glass when the nail maker reappeared, making fun of them and coming close up to them

with an air of provocation. Zacharie, insulted in his good family feelings, threw himself on the insolent intruder.

"That's my sister, you swine! Just wait a bit, and I'm damned if I don't make you respect her."

The two men were separated, while Chaval, who was quite calm, only repeated:

"Let be! It's my concern. I tell you I don't care a damn for him."

Maheu now arrived with his party and quieted Catherine and Philomène, who were in tears. The nail maker had disappeared, and there was laughter in the crowd. To finally conclude the episode Chaval, who was at home at the Piquette Estaminet, called for drinks. Etienne had touched glasses with Catherine, and all drank together—the father, the daughter and her lover, the son and his mistress—saying politely: "To your good health!" Pierron afterward persisted in paying for more drinks. And they were all in good humor when Zacharie, at the sight of his comrade Mouquet, called him, as he said, to go and finish his affair with the nail maker.

"I shall have to go and do for him! Here, Chaval, keep Philomène with Catherine. I'm coming back."

Maheu offered drinks in his turn. After all, if the lad wished to avenge his sister it was not a bad example. But as soon as she had seen Mouquet, Philomène felt at rest and nodded her head. Sure enough, the two chaps would be off to the Volcan!

On the evening of feast days the fair was terminated in the ballroom of the Bon-Joyeux. It was a widow, Mme Désir, who kept this ballroom, a fat matron of fifty, as round as a tub, but so fresh that she still had six lovers, one for every day of the week, she said, and the six together for Sunday. She called all the miners her children and grew tender at the thought of the flood of beer which she had poured out for them during the last thirty years, and she boasted also that a putter never became pregnant without having first stretched her legs at her establishment. There were two rooms in the Bon-Joyeux: the bar which contained the counter and tables, then, communicating with it on the same floor by a large arch, was the ballroom, a large hall only planked in the middle, being paved with bricks round the sides. It was decorated with two garlands of paper flowers which crossed one another and were united in the middle by a crown of the same flowers, while along the walls were rows of gilt shields bearing the names of saints—Saint Eloi, patron of the iron-workers; Saint Crispin, patron of the shoemakers; Sainte Barbe, patron of the miners; the whole calendar of corporations. The ceiling was so low that the three musicians on their platform, which was about the size of a pulpit, knocked their heads against it. When it became dark four petroleum lamps were fastened to the four corners of the room.

On this Sunday there was dancing from five o'clock with the full daylight through the windows, but it was not until toward seven that the rooms began to fill. Outside a gale was rising, blowing great black showers of dust which blinded people and sleeted into the frying pans. Maheu, Etienne and Pierron, having come in to sit down, found Chaval at the Bon-Joyeux dancing with

Catherine, while Philomène, by herself, was looking on. Neither Levaque nor Zacharie had reappeared. As there were no benches around the ballroom, Catherine came after each dance to rest at her father's table. They called Philomène, but she preferred to stand up. The twilight was coming on; the three musicians played furiously; one could only see in the hall the movement of hips and breasts in the midst of a confusion of arms. The appearance of the four lamps was greeted noisily, and suddenly everything was lit up—the red faces, the disheveled hair sticking to the skin, the flying skirts spreading abroad the strong odor of perspiring couples. Maheu pointed out Mouquette to Etienne: she was as round and greasy as a bladder of lard, revolving violently in the arms of a tall, lean lander. She had been obliged to console herself and take a man.

At last at eight o'clock Maheude appeared with Estelle at her breast, followed by Alzire, Henri and Lénore. She had come there straight to her husband without fear of missing him. They could sup later on; as yet nobody was hungry, with their stomachs soaked in coffee and thickened with beer. Other women came in, and they whispered together when they saw, behind Maheude, the Levaque woman enter with Bouteloup, who led in by the hand Achille and Désirée, Philomène's little ones. The two neighbors seemed to be getting on well together, one turning round to chat with the other. On the way there had been a great explanation, and Maheude had resigned herself to Zacharie's marriage, in despair at the loss of her eldest son's wages but overcome by the thought that she could not hold it back any longer without injustice. She was trying, therefore, to put a good face on it, though with an anxious heart, as a housekeeper who was asking herself how she could make both ends meet now that the best part of her purse was going.

"Place yourself there, neighbor," she said, pointing to a table near that where Maheu was drinking with Etienne and Pierron.

"Is not my husband with you?" asked the Levaque woman.

The others told her that he would soon come. They were all seated together in a heap, Bouteloup and the youngsters so tightly squeezed among the drinkers that the two tables only formed one. There was a call for drinks. Seeing her mother and her children, Philomène had decided to come near. She accepted a chair and seemed pleased to hear that she was at last to be married; then as they were looking for Zacharie, she replied in her soft voice:

"I am waiting for him; he is over there."

Maheu had exchanged a look with his wife. She had then consented? He became serious and smoked in silence. He also felt anxiety for the morrow in face of the ingratitude of these children who got married one by one, leaving their parents in wretchedness.

The dancing still went on, and the end of a quadrille drowned the ballroom in red dust; the walls cracked; a cornet produced shrill whistling sounds like a locomotive in distress, and when the dancers stopped they were smoking like horses.

"Do you remember?" said the Levaque woman, bending toward Maheude's ear. "You talked of strangling Catherine if she did anything foolish!"

Chaval brought Catherine back to the family table and, both of them standing behind the father, finished their glasses.

"Bah!" murmured Maheude with an air of resignation. "One says things like that— But what quiets me is that she will not have a child; I feel sure of that. You see, if she is confined and obliged to marry, what shall we do for a living then?"

Now the cornet was whistling a polka, and as the deafening noise began again Maheu, in a low voice, communicated an idea to his wife. Why should they not take a lodger? Etienne, for example, who was looking out for quarters. They would have room since Zacharie was going to leave them, and the money that they would lose in that direction would be in part regained in the other. Maheude's face brightened; certainly it was a good idea; it must be arranged. She seemed to be saved from starvation once more, and her good humor returned so quickly that she ordered a new round of drinks.

Etienne, meanwhile, was seeking to indoctrinate Pierron, to whom he was explaining his plan of a provident fund. He had made him promise to subscribe when he was imprudent enough to reveal his real aim.

"And if we go out on strike you can see how useful that fund will be. We can snap our fingers at the company; we shall have there a fund to fight against them. Eh? Don't you think so?"

Pierron lowered his eyes and grew pale; he stammered:

"I'll think over it. Good conduct, that's the best provident fund."

Then Maheu took possession of Etienne, and all square, like a good man, proposed to take him as a lodger. The young man accepted at once, anxious to live in the settlement with the idea of being nearer to his mates. The matter was settled in three words, Maheude declaring that they would wait for the marriage of the children.

Just then Zacharie at last came back with Mouquet and Levaque. The three brought in the odors of the Volcan, a breath of gin, a musky acidity of ill-kept girls. They were very tipsy and seemed well pleased with themselves, pushing their elbows into each other and grinning. When he knew that he was at last to be married Zacharie began to laugh so loudly that he choked. Philomène peacefully declared that she would rather see him laugh than cry. As there were no more chairs, Bouteloup had moved so as to give up half of his to Levaque. And the latter, suddenly much affected by realizing that the whole family party was there, once more had beer served out.

"By the Lord, we don't amuse ourselves so often!" he roared.

They remained there till ten o'clock. Women continued to arrive, either to join or to take away their men; bands of children followed in rows, and the mothers no longer troubled themselves, pulling out their long pale breasts, like sacks of oats, and smearing their chubby babies with milk, while the little ones who were already able to walk, gorged with beer and on all fours beneath the table, relieved themselves without shame. It was a rising sea of beer from Mme Désir's disembowled barrels; the beer enlarged every belly, flowing from noses, eyes and everywhere. So puffed out was the crowd that everyone had a shoulder or knee poking into his neighbor; all were cheerful and merry in

thus feeling each other's elbows. A continuous laugh kept their mouths open from ear to ear. The heat was like an oven; they were roasting and felt themselves at ease with glistening skin, gilded in a thick smoke from the pipes; the only discomfort was when one had to move away; from time to time a girl rose, went to the other end, near the pump, lifted her clothes and then came back. Beneath the garlands of painted paper the dancers could no longer see each other; they perspired so much; this encouraged the trammers to tumble over the putters, catching them by chance by the hips. But where a girl tumbled with a man over her a cornet covered their fall with its furious music; the swirl of feet rolled round them as if the ball had covered them.

Someone who was passing warned Pierron that his daughter Lydie was sleeping at the door, across the pavement. She had drunk her share of the stolen bottle and was tipsy. He had to carry her away in his arms while Jeanlin and Bébert, who were more sober, followed him behind, thinking it a great joke. This was the signal for departure, and several families came out of the Bon-Joyeux, the Maheus and the Levaques deciding to return to the settlement. At the same moment Father Bonnemort and old Mouque also left Montsou, walking in the same somnambulistic manner, preserving the obstinate silence of their recollections. And they all went back together, passing for the last time through the fair, where the frying pans were coagulating, and by the *estaminets*, from which the last glasses were flowing in a stream toward the middle of the road. The storm was still threatening, and sounds of laughter arose as they left the lighted houses to lose themselves in the dark country around. Panting breaths arose from the ripe wheat; many children must have been made on that night. They arrived in confusion at the settlement. Neither the Levaques nor the Maheus supped with appetite, and the latter went to bed on finishing their morning's boiled beef.

Etienne had led away Chaval for one more drink at Rasseneur's.

"I am with you!" said Chaval when his mate had explained the matter of the provident fund. "Strike away at it; you're a fine fellow!"

The beginning of drunkenness was flaming in Etienne's eyes. He exclaimed:

"Yes, let's join hands. As for me, you know I would give up everything for the sake of justice, both drink and girls. There's only one thing that warms my heart, and that is the thought that we are going to sweep away these bourgeois."

CHAPTER III

TOWARD THE MIDDLE OF AUGUST Etienne settled with the Maheus, Zacharie having married and obtained from the company a vacant house in the settlement for Philomène and the two children. During the first days the young man experienced some constraint in the presence of Catherine. There was a constant intimacy, as he everywhere replaced the elder brother, sharing Jeanlin's bed in front of the big sister's. Going to bed and getting up, he had to dress and undress near her and see her take off and put on her garments. When

the last skirt fell from her she appeared of pallid whiteness, that transparent snow of anemic blondes, and he experienced a constant emotion in finding her, with hands and face already spoiled, as white as if dipped in milk from her heels to her neck, where the line of tan turned suddenly into a necklace of amber. He pretended to turn away, but little by little he knew her: the feet at first, which his lowered eyes met; then a glimpse of a knee when she slid beneath the coverlet; then her bosom with little rigid breasts as she leaned over the bowl in the morning. She would hasten without looking at him and in ten seconds was undressed and stretched beside Alzire, with so supple and snakelike a movement that he had scarcely taken off his shoes when she disappeared, turning her back and only showing her heavy knot of hair.

She never had any reason to be angry with him. If a sort of obsession made him watch her in spite of himself from the moment when she lay down, he avoided all practical jokes or dangerous pastimes. The parents were there, and, besides, he still had for her a feeling, half of friendship and half of spite, which prevented him from treating her as a girl to be desired in the midst of the abandonment of their now-common life in dressing, at meals, during work, where nothing of them remained secret, not even their most intimate needs. All the modesty of the family had taken refuge in the daily bath, for which the young girl now went upstairs alone, while the men bathed below one after the other.

At the end of the first month Etienne and Catherine seemed no longer to see each other when in the evening, before extinguishing the candle, they moved about the room, undressed. She had ceased to hasten and resumed her old custom of doing up her hair at the edge of her bed, while her arms, raised in the air, lifted her chemise to her thighs, and he, without his trousers, sometimes helped her, looking for the hairpins that she had lost. Custom killed the shame of being naked; they found it natural to be like this, for they were doing no harm, and it was not their fault if there was only one room for so many people. Sometimes, however, a trouble came over them suddenly, at moments when they had no guilty thought. After some nights when he had not seen her pale body he suddenly saw her white all over, with a whiteness which shook him with a shiver, which obliged him to turn away for fear of yielding to the desire to take her. On other evenings, without any apparent reason, she would be overcome by a panic of modesty and hasten to slip between the sheets, as if she felt the hands of this lad seizing her. Then when the candle was out they both knew that they were not sleeping but were thinking of each other in spite of their weariness. This made them restless and sulky all the following day; they liked best the tranquil evenings when they could behave together like comrades.

Etienne only complained of Jeanlin, who slept like a cocked pistol. Alzire slept lightly, and L  nore and Henri were found in the morning in each other's arms, exactly as they had gone to sleep. In the dark house there was no other sound than the snoring of Maheu and Maheude, rolling out at regular intervals like a forge bellows. On the whole, Etienne was better off than at Rasseneur's; the bed was tolerable, and the sheets were changed every month. He had

better soup, too, and only suffered from the rarity of meat. But they were all in the same condition, and for forty-five francs he could not demand rabbit to every meal. These forty-five francs helped the family and enabled them to make both ends meet, though always leaving some small debts in arrears, so the Maheus were grateful to their lodger; his linen was washed and mended, his buttons sewed on and his affairs kept in order; in fact, he felt all around him a woman's neatness and care.

It was at this time that Etienne began to understand the ideas that were buzzing in his brain. Up till then he had only felt an instinctive revolt in the midst of the inarticulate fermentation among his mates. All sorts of confused questions came up before him: Why were some miserable? Why were others rich? Why were the former beneath the heel of the latter without hope of ever taking their place? And his first stage was to understand his ignorance. A secret shame, a hidden annoyance, gnawed him from that time; he knew nothing; he dared not talk about these things which were working in him like a passion—the equality of all men and the equity which demanded a fair division of the earth's wealth. He thus took to the methodless study of those who in ignorance feel the fascination of knowledge. He now kept up a regular correspondence with Pluchart, who was better educated than himself and more advanced in the Socialist movement. He had books sent to him, and his ill-digested reading still further excited his brain—especially a medical book entitled *Hygiène du Mineur*, in which a Belgian doctor had summed up the evils of which the people in coal mines were dying—without counting treatises on political economy, incomprehensible in their technical dryness, anarchist pamphlets which upset his ideas and old numbers of newspapers which he preserved as irrefutable arguments for possible discussion. Souvarine also lent him books, and the work on co-operative societies had made him dream for a month of a universal exchange association, abolishing money and basing the whole social life on work. The shame of his ignorance left him, and a certain pride came to him now that he felt himself thinking.

During these first months Etienne retained the ecstasy of a novice; his heart was bursting with generous indignation against the oppressors and looking forward to the approaching triumph of the oppressed. He had not yet manufactured a system; his reading had been too vague. Rasseneur's practical demands were mixed up in his mind with Souvarine's violent and destructive methods, and when he came out of the *Avantage*, where he was to be found nearly every day, railing with them against the company, he walked as if in a dream, assisting at a radical regeneration of nations to be effected without one broken window or a single drop of blood. The methods of execution remained obscure; he preferred to think that things would go very well, for he lost his head as soon as he tried to formulate a program of reconstruction. He even showed himself full of illogical moderation; he often said that we must banish politics from the social question, a phrase which he had read and which seemed a useful one to repeat among the phlegmatic colliers with whom he lived.

Every evening now at the Maheus', they delayed half an hour before going up to bed. Etienne always introduced the same subject. As his nature became

more refined he found himself wounded by the promiscuity of the settlement. Were they beasts to be thus penned together in the midst of the fields, so tightly packed that one could not change one's shirt without exhibiting one's backside to the neighbors? And how bad it was for health, and boys and girls were forced to grow corrupt together.

"Lord!" replied Maheu. "If there were more money there would be more comfort. All the same, it's true enough that it's good for no one to live piled up like that. It always ends with making the men drunk and the girls big-bellied."

And the family began to talk, each having his say, while the petroleum lamp vitiated the air of the room, already stinking of fried onion. No, life was certainly not a joke. One had to work like a brute at labor which was once a punishment for convicts; one left one's skin there oftener than was one's turn, all that without even getting meat on the table in the evening. No doubt one had one's feed; one ate, indeed, but so little, just enough to suffer without dying, overcome with debts and pursued as if one had stolen the bread. When Sunday came one slept from weariness. The only pleasures were to get drunk and to get a child with one's wife; then the beer swelled the belly, and the child, later on, left you to go to the dogs. No, it was certainly not a joke.

Then Maheude joined in.

"The bother is, you see, when you have to say to yourself that it won't change. When you're young you think that happiness will come sometime; you hope for things, and then the wretchedness begins always over again, and you get shut up in it. Now I don't wish harm to anyone, but there are times when this injustice makes me mad."

There was silence; they were all breathing with the vague discomfort of this closed-in horizon. Father Bonnemort only, if he was there, opened his eyes with surprise, for in his time people used not to worry about things; they were born in the coal and they hammered at the seam without asking for more, while now there was an air passing which made the colliers ambitious.

"It don't do to spit at anything," he murmured. "A good glass is a good glass. As to the masters, they're often rascals, but there always will be masters, won't there? What's the use of breaking your head by thinking about those things?"

Etienne at once became animated. What! The worker was to be forbidden to think? Why, that was just it; things would change now because the worker had begun to think. In the old man's time the miner lived in the mine like a brute, like a machine for extracting coal, always under the earth, with ears and eyes stopped to outward events. So the rich, who governed, found it easy to sell him and buy him and to devour his flesh; he did not even know what was going on. But now the miner was waking up down there, germinating in the earth just as a grain germinates, and some fine day he would spring up in the midst of the fields; yes, men would spring up, an army of men who would re-establish justice. Is it not true that all citizens are equal since the Revolution, because they vote together? Why should the worker remain the slave of the master who pays him? The big companies with their machines were crushing everything, and one no longer had against them the ancient guarantees when

people of the same trade, united in a body, were able to defend themselves. It was for that, by God, and for no other reason, that all would burst up one day, thanks to education. One had only to look into the settlement itself: the grandfathers could not sign their names; the fathers could do so, and as for the sons, they read and wrote like schoolmasters. Ah, it was springing up; it was springing up, little by little, a rough harvest of men who would ripen in the sun! From the moment when they were no longer each of them stuck to his place for his whole existence, and that they had the ambition to take a neighbor's place, why should they not hit out with their fists and try for the mastery?

Maheu was shaken but remained full of doubts.

"As soon as you move they give you back your certificate," he said. "The old man is right; it will always be the miner who gets all the trouble, without a chance of a leg of mutton now and then as a reward."

Maheude, who had been silent for a while, awoke as from a dream.

"But if what the priests tell is true, if the poor people in this world become the rich ones in the next!"

A burst of laughter interrupted her; even the children shrugged their shoulders, being incredulous in the open air, keeping a secret fear of ghosts in the pit but glad of the empty sky.

"Ah, bosh! The priests!" exclaimed Maheu. "If they believed that they'd eat less and work more so as to reserve a better place for themselves up there. No, when one's dead one's dead."

Maheude sighed deeply.

"Oh lord, lord!"

Then her hands fell onto her knees with a gesture of immense dejection:

"Then if that's true we are done for, we are."

They all looked at one another. Father Bonnemort spat into his handkerchief, while Maheu sat with his extinguished pipe, which he had forgotten, in his mouth. Alzire listened between Lénore and Henri, who were sleeping on the edge of the table. But Catherine, with her chin in her hand, never took her large clear eyes off Etienne while he was protesting, declaring his faith and opening out the enchanting future of his social dream. Around them the settlement was asleep; one only heard the stray cries of a child or the complaints of a belated drunkard. In the parlor the clock ticked slowly, and a damp freshness arose from the sanded floor in spite of the stuffy air.

"Fine ideas!" said the young man. "Why do you need a good God and his Paradise to make you happy? Haven't you got it in your own power to make yourselves happy on the earth?"

With his enthusiastic voice he spoke on and on. The closed horizon was bursting out; a gap of light was opening in the somber lives of these poor people. The eternal wretchedness, beginning over and over again, the brutalizing labor, the fate of a beast who gives his wool and has his throat cut—all the misfortune disappeared, as though swept away by a great flood of sunlight, and beneath the dazzling gleam of fairyland justice descended from heaven. Since the good God was dead, justice would assure the happiness of men, and

equality and brotherhood would reign. A new society would spring up in a day, just as in dreams, an immense town with the splendor of a mirage, in which each citizen lived by his work and took his share in the common joys. The old rotten world had fallen to dust; a young humanity purged from its crimes formed but a single nation of workers, having for their motto: "To each according to his deserts, and to each desert according to its performance." And this dream grew continually larger and more beautiful and more seductive as it mounted higher in the impossible.

At first Maheude refused to listen, possessed by a deep dread. No, no, it was too beautiful; it would not do to embark in these ideas, for they made life seem abominable afterward, and one would have destroyed everything in the effort to be happy. When she saw Maheu's eyes shine and that he was troubled and won over, she became restless and exclaimed, interrupting Etienne:

"Don't listen, my man! You can see he's only telling us fairy tales. Do you think the bourgeois would ever consent to work as we do?"

But little by little the charm worked on her also. Her imagination was aroused, and she smiled at last, entering this marvelous world of hope. It was so sweet to forget for a while the sad reality! When one lives like the beasts with faces bent toward the earth, one needs a corner of falsehood where one can amuse oneself by regaling on the things one will never possess. And what made her enthusiastic and brought her into agreement with the young man was the idea of justice.

"Now there you're right!" she exclaimed. "When a thing's just I don't mind being cut to pieces for it. And it's true enough! It would be just for us to have a turn."

Then Maheu ventured to become excited.

"Blast it all! I am not rich, but I would give five francs to keep alive to see that. What a hustling, eh? Will it be soon? And how can we set about it?"

Etienne began talking again. The old social system was cracking; it could not last more than a few months, he affirmed roundly. As to the methods of execution, he spoke more vaguely, mixing up his reading and fearing before ignorant hearers to enter on explanations where he might lose himself. All the systems had their share in it, softened by the certainty of easy triumph, a universal kiss which would bring to an end all class misunderstandings, without taking count, however, of the thick heads among the masters and bourgeois, whom it would perhaps be necessary to bring to reason by force. And the Maheus looked as if they understood, approving and accepting miraculous solutions with the blind faith of new believers, like those Christians of the early days of the church, who awaited the coming of a perfect society on the dunghill of the ancient world. Little Alzire picked up a few words and imagined happiness under the form of a very warm house, where children could play and eat as long as they liked. Catherine, without moving, her chin always resting in her hand, kept her eyes fixed on Etienne, and when he stopped a slight shudder passed over her, and she was quite pale, as if she felt the cold.

But Maheude looked at the clock.

"Past nine! Can it be possible? We shall never get up tomorrow."

And the Maheus left the table with hearts ill at ease and in despair. It seemed to them that they had just been rich and that they had now suddenly fallen back into the mud. Father Bonnemort, who was setting out for the pit, growled that those sorts of stories wouldn't make the soup better, while the others went upstairs in single file, noticing the dampness of the walls and the pestiferous stuffiness of the air. Upstairs amid the heavy slumber of the settlement, when Catherine had got into bed last and blown out the candle, Etienne heard her tossing feverishly before getting to sleep.

Often at these conversations the neighbors came in: Levaque, who grew excited at the idea of a general sharing; Pierron, who prudently went to bed as soon as they attacked the company. At long intervals Zacharie came in for a moment, but politics bored him; he preferred to go off and drink a glass at the *Avantage*. As to Chaval, he would go to extremes and wanted to draw blood. Nearly every evening he passed an hour with the Maheus; in this assiduity there was a certain unconfessed jealousy, the fear that he would be robbed of Catherine. This girl, of whom he was already growing tired, had become precious to him now that a man slept near her and could take her at night.

Etienne's influence increased; he gradually revolutionized the settlement. His propaganda was unseen and all the more sure since he was growing in the estimation of all. Maheude, notwithstanding the caution of a prudent housekeeper, treated him with consideration, as a young man who paid regularly and neither drank nor gambled, with his nose always in a book; she spread abroad his reputation among the neighbors as an educated lad, a reputation which they abused by asking him to write their letters. He was a sort of businessman, charged with correspondences and consulted by households in affairs of difficulty. Since September he had thus at last been able to establish his famous provident fund, which was still very precarious, only including the inhabitants of the settlement; but he hoped to be able to obtain the adhesion of the miners at all the pits, especially if the company, which had remained passive, continued not to interfere. He had been made secretary of the association and he even received a small salary for the clerking. This made him almost rich. If a married miner can with difficulty make both ends meet, a sober lad who has no burdens can even manage to save.

From this time a slow transformation took place in Etienne. Certain instincts of refinement and comfort which had slept during his poverty were now revealed. He began to buy cloth garments; he also bought a pair of elegant boots; he became a big man. The whole settlement grouped round him. The satisfaction of his self-love was delicious; he became intoxicated with this first enjoyment of popularity, to be at the head of others, to command—he was so young and but the day before had been a mere laborer. This filled him with pride and enlarged his dream of an approaching revolution in which he was to play a part. His face changed; he became serious and put on airs, while his growing ambition inflamed his theories and pushed him to ideas of violence.

But autumn was advancing, and the October cold had blighted the little gardens of the settlement. Behind the thin lilacs the trammers no longer tumbled the putters over on the shed, and only the winter vegetables remained, the cab-

gages pearly with white frost, the leeks and the salads. Once more the rains were beating down on the red tiles and flowing down into the tubs beneath the gutters with the sound of a torrent. In every house the stove piled up with coal was never cold and poisoned the close parlors. It was the season of wretchedness beginning once more.

In October, on one of the first frosty nights, Etienne, feverish after his conversation below, could not sleep. He had seen Catherine glide beneath the coverlet and then blow out the candle. She also appeared to be quite overcome and tormented by one of those fits of modesty which still made her hasten sometimes, and so awkwardly that she only uncovered herself more. In the darkness she lay as though dead, but he knew that she also was awake, and he felt that she was thinking of him just as he was thinking of her: this mute exchange of their beings had never before filled them with such trouble. The minutes went by and neither he nor she moved; only their breathing was embarrassed in spite of their efforts to retain it. Twice over he was on the point of rising and taking her. It was idiotic to have such a strong desire for each other and never to satisfy it. Why should they thus sulk against what they desired? The children were asleep; she was quite willing; he was certain that she was waiting for him, stifling, and that she would close her arms round him in silence with clenched teeth. Nearly an hour passed. He did not go to take her, and she did not turn round for fear of calling him. The more they lived side by side, the more a barrier was raised of shames, repugnancies, delicacies of friendship, which they could not explain even to themselves.

CHAPTER IV

"LISTEN," said Maheude to her man, "when you go to Montsou for the pay just bring me back a pound of coffee and a kilo of sugar."

He was sewing one of his shoes in order to spare the cobbling.

"Good!" he murmured without leaving his task.

"I should like you to go to the butcher's too. A bit of veal, eh? It's so long since we saw it."

This time he raised his head.

"Do you think then that I've got thousands coming in? The fortnight's pay is too little as it is, with their confounded idea of always stopping work."

They were both silent. It was after breakfast one Saturday at the end of October. The company, under the pretext of the derangement caused by payment, had on this day once more suspended the output in all their pits. Seized by panic at the growing industrial crisis and not wishing to augment their already considerable stock, they profited by the smallest pretexts to force their ten thousand workers to rest.

"You know that Etienne is waiting for you at Rasseneur's," began Maheude again. "Take him with you; he'll be more clever than you are in clearing up matters if they haven't counted all your hours."

Maheu nodded approval.

"And just talk to those gentlemen about your father's affair. The doctor's on good terms with the directors. It's true, isn't it, old un, that the doctor's mistaken and that you can still work?"

For ten days Father Bonnemort, with benumbed paws, as he said, had remained nailed to his chair. She had to repeat her question, and he growled:

"Sure enough, I can work. One isn't done for because one's legs are bad. All that is just stories they make up so as not to give one the hundred-and-eighty-franc pension."

Maheude thought of the old man's forty sous, which he would, perhaps, never bring in any more, and she uttered a cry of anguish.

"My God, we shall soon be all dead if this goes on!"

"When one is dead," said Maheu, "one doesn't get hungry."

He put some nails into his shoes and decided to set out. The Deux-Cent-Quarante settlement would not be paid till toward four o'clock. The men did not hurry, therefore, but waited about, going off one by one, beset by the women, who implored them to come back at once. Many gave them commissions to prevent them forgetting themselves in public houses.

At Rasseneur's Etienne had received news. Disquieting rumors were flying about; it was said that the company was more and more discontented over the timbering. They were overwhelming the workmen with fines, and a conflict appeared inevitable. That was, however, only the avowed dispute; beneath it there were grave and secret causes of complication.

Just as Etienne arrived a comrade, who was drinking a glass on his return from Montsou, was telling that an announcement had been struck up at the cashier's, but he did not quite know what was on the announcement. A second entered, then a third, and each brought a different story. It seemed certain, however, that the company had taken a resolution.

"What do you say of it, eh?" asked Etienne, sitting down near Souvarine at a table where nothing was to be seen but a packet of tobacco.

The engineman did not hurry but finished rolling his cigarette.

"I say that it was easy to foresee. They want to push you to extremes."

He alone had a sufficiently keen intelligence to analyze the situation. He explained it in his quiet way. The company, suffering from the crisis, had been forced to reduce its expenses if it were not to succumb, and it was naturally the workers who would have to tighten their bellies; under some pretext or another the company would nibble at their wages. For two months the coal had been remaining at the surface of their pits, and nearly all the workshops were resting. As the company did not dare to rest in this way, terrified at the ruinous inaction, it was meditating a middle course, perhaps a strike, from which the miners would come out crushed and worse paid. Then the new provident fund was disturbing them, as it was a threat for the future, while a strike would relieve them of it by exhausting it when it was still small.

Rasseneur had seated himself beside Etienne, and both of them were listening in consternation. They could talk in a loud voice because there was no one there but Mme Rasseneur, seated at the counter.

"What an idea!" murmured the innkeeper. "What's the good of it? The

company has no interest in a strike, nor the men either. It would be best to come to an understanding."

This was very sensible. He was always on the side of reasonable demands. Since the rapid popularity of his old lodger he had even exaggerated this system of reasonable progress, saying they would obtain nothing if they wished to have everything at once. In his fat, good-humored nature, nourished on beer, a secret jealousy was forming, increased by the desertion of his bar, into which the workmen from the Voreux now came more rarely to drink and to listen, and he thus sometimes even began to defend the company, forgetting the rancor of an old miner who had been turned off.

"Then you are against the strike?" cried Mme Rasseneur without leaving the counter.

And as he energetically replied, "Yes!" she made him hold his tongue.

"Bah! You have no courage; let these gentlemen speak."

Etienne was meditating with his eyes fixed on the glass which she had served to him. At last he raised his head.

"I dare say it's all true what our mate tells us, and we must get resigned to this strike if they force it on us. Pluchart has just written me some very sensible things on this matter. He's against the strike, too, for the men would suffer as much as the masters, and it wouldn't come to anything decisive. Only it seems to him a capital chance to get our men to make up their minds to go into his big machine. Here's his letter."

In fact, Pluchart, in despair at the suspicion which the International aroused among the miners at Montsou, was hoping to see them enter in a mass if they were forced to fight against the company. In spite of his efforts Etienne had not been able to place a single member's card, and he had given his best efforts to his provident fund, which was much better received. But this fund was still so small that it would be quickly exhausted, as Souvarine said, and the strikers would then inevitably throw themselves into the association of workers so that their brothers in every country could come to their aid.

"How much have you in the fund?" asked Rasseneur.

"Hardly three thousand francs," replied Etienne, "and you know that the directors sent for me yesterday. Oh, they were very polite; they repeated that they wouldn't prevent their men from forming a reserve fund. But I understood that they wanted to control it. We are bound to have a struggle over that."

The innkeeper was walking up and down, whistling contemptuously. "Three thousand francs! What can you do with that! It wouldn't yield six days' bread, and if one took strangers into account, such as the people in England, one might go to bed at once and swallow one's tongue. No, it was too foolish, this strike!"

Then for the first time bitter words passed between these two men who usually agreed together at last in their common hatred of capital.

"We shall see! And you, what do you say of it?" repeated Etienne, turning toward Souvarine.

The latter replied with his usual phrase of habitual contempt.

"A strike? Foolery!"

Then in the midst of the angry silence he added gently:

"On the whole, I shouldn't say no if it amuses you; it ruins the one side and kills the other, and that is always so much cleared away. Only in that way it will take quite a thousand years to renew the world. Just begin by blowing up this prison in which you are all being done to death!"

With his delicate hand he pointed out the Voreux, the buildings of which could be seen through the open door. But an unforeseen drama interrupted him: Poland, the big tame rabbit which had ventured outside, came bounding back, fleeing from the stones of a band of trammers, and in her terror, with fallen ears and raised tail, she took refuge against his legs, scratching and imploring for him to take her up. When he had placed her on his knees he sheltered her with both hands and fell into that kind of dreamy somnolence into which the caress of this soft, warm fur always plunged him.

Almost at the same time Maheu came in. He would drink nothing, in spite of the polite insistence of Mme Rasseneur, who sold her beer as though she made a present of it. Etienne had risen, and both of them set out for Montsou.

On payday at the company's yards Montsou seemed to be in the midst of a fete, as on fine Sunday feast days. Bands of miners arrived from all the settlements. The cashier's office being very small, they preferred to wait at the door, stationed in groups on the pavement, barring the way in a crowd that was constantly renewed. Hucksters profited by the occasion and installed themselves with their movable stalls that sold even pottery and pork. But it was especially the *estaminets* and the bars which did a good trade, for the miners before being paid went to the counters to get patience and returned to them to wet their pay as soon as they had it in their pockets. But they were very sensible, except when they finished it at the Volcan. As Maheu and Etienne advanced among the groups they felt that on that day a deep exasperation was rising. It was not the ordinary indifference with which the money was taken and spent at the publics. Fists were clenched and violent words were passing from mouth to mouth.

"Is it true then," asked Maheu of Chaval, whom he met before the Estaminet Picquette, "that they've played the dirty trick?"

But Chaval contented himself by replying with a furious growl, throwing a sidelong look on Etienne. Since the working had been renewed he had hired himself on with others, more and more bitten by envy against this comrade, the newcomer who posed as a boss and whose boots, as he said, were licked by the whole settlement. This was complicated by a lover's jealousy. He never took Catherine to Réquillart now or behind the pit bank without accusing her in abominable language of sleeping with her mother's lodger; then, seized by savage desire, he would stifle her with caresses.

Maheu asked him another question:

"Is it the Voreux's turn now?"

And when he turned his back, nodding affirmatively, both men decided to enter the yards.

The countinghouse was a small rectangular room, divided in two by a grating. On the forms along the wall five or six miners were waiting, while the

cashier, assisted by a clerk, was paying another who stood before the wicket with his cap in his hand. Above the form on the left a yellow placard was stuck up, quite fresh against the smoky gray of the plaster, and it was in front of this that the men had been constantly passing all the morning. They entered two or three at a time, stood in front of it and then went away without a word, shrugging their shoulders as if their backs were crushed.

Two colliers were just then standing in front of the announcement, a young one with a square, brutish head and a very thin, old one, his face dull with age. Neither of them could read; the young one spelled, moving his lips; the old one contented himself with gazing stupidly. Many came in thus to look, without understanding.

"Read us that there!" said Maheu, who was not very strong either in reading, to his companion.

Then Etienne began to read him the announcement. It was a notice from the company to the miners of all the pits, informing them that in consequence of the lack of care bestowed on the timbering and being weary of inflicting useless fines, the company had resolved to apply a new method of payment for the extraction of coal. Henceforward it would pay for the timbering separately, by the cubic meter of wood taken down and used, based on the quantity necessary for good work. The price of the tub of coal extracted would naturally be lowered in the proportion of fifty centimes to forty, according to the nature and distance of the cuttings, and a somewhat obscure calculation endeavored to show that this diminution of ten centimes would be exactly compensated by the price of the timbering. The company added also that, wishing to leave everyone time to convince himself of the advantages presented by this new scheme, it did not propose to apply it till Monday, the first of December.

"If you would not read so loud over there," shouted the cashier, "we could hear what we are saying here."

Etienne finished reading without paying attention to this observation. His voice trembled, and when he had reached the end they all continued to gaze expectantly at the placard. The old miner and the young one looked as though they expected something more; then they went away with depressed shoulders.

"Good God!" muttered Maheu.

He and his companions sat down absorbed, with lowered heads, and while files of men continued to pass before the yellow paper they made calculations. Were they being made fun of? They could never make up with the timbering for the ten centimes taken off the tram. At most they could only get to eight centimes, so the company would be robbing them of two centimes, without counting the time taken by careful work. This, then, was what this disguised lowering of wages really came to. The company was economizing out of the miners' pockets.

"Good lord! Good lord!" repeated Maheu, raising his head. "We should be bloody fools if we took that."

But the wicket being free, he went up to be paid. The heads only of the workings presented themselves at the desk and then divided the money between their men to save time.

"Maheu and associates," said the clerk, "Filonnière seam, cutting number seven."

He searched through the lists which were prepared from the inspection of the tickets on which the captains stated every day for each yard the number of trams extracted. Then he repeated:

"Maheu and associates, Filonnière seam, cutting number seven. One hundred and thirty-five francs."

The cashier paid.

"Beg pardon, sir," stammered the pikeman in surprise. "Are you sure you have not made a mistake?"

He looked at this small sum of money without picking it up, frozen by a shudder which went to his heart. It was true he was expecting bad payment, but it could not come to so little, or he must have calculated wrong. When he had given their shares to Zacharie, Etienne and the other mate who replaced Chaval, there would remain at most fifty francs for himself, his father, Catherine and Jeanlin.

"No, no, I've made no mistake," replied the clerk. "There are two Sundays and four rest days to be taken off; that makes nine days of work." Maheu followed this calculation in a low voice: nine days gave him about thirty francs, eighteen to Catherine, nine to Jeanlin. As to Father Bonnemort, he only had three days. No matter, by adding the ninety francs of Zacharie and the two mates, that would surely make more.

"And don't forget the fines," added the clerk. "Twenty francs for fines for defective timbering."

The pikeman made a gesture of despair. Twenty francs of fines, four days of rest! That made out the account. To think that he had once brought back a fortnight's pay of full a hundred and fifty francs when Father Bonnemort was working and Zacharie was not yet in the household!

"Well, are you going to take it?" cried the cashier impatiently. "You can see there's someone else waiting. If you don't want it say so."

As Maheu decided to pick up the money with his large trembling hand the clerk stopped him.

"Wait. I have your name here. Toussaint Maheu, is it not? The general secretary wishes to speak to you. Go in; he is alone."

The dazed workman found himself in an office furnished with old mahogany, upholstered with faded green rep. And he listened for five minutes to the general secretary, a tall, sallow gentleman, who spoke to him over the papers of his bureau without rising. But the buzzing in his ears prevented him from hearing. He understood vaguely that the question of his father's retirement would be taken into consideration with reference to the pension of a hundred and fifty francs, fifty years of age and forty years' service. Then it seemed to him that the secretary's voice became harder. There was a reprimand: he was accused of occupying himself with politics; an allusion was made to his lodger and the provident fund; finally he was advised not to compromise himself with these follies, he, who was one of the best workmen in the mine. He wished to

protest but could only pronounce words at random, twisting his cap between his feverish fingers, and he retired, stuttering:

"Certainly, sir—I can assure you, sir—"

Outside, when he had found Etienne, who was waiting for him, he broke out:

"Well, I am a bloody fool; I ought to have replied! Not enough money to get bread, and insults as well! Yes, he has been talking against you; he told me the settlement was being poisoned. And what's to be done? Good God! Bend one's back and say thank you. He's right; that's the wisest plan."

Maheu was silent, overcome at once by rage and fear. Etienne was gloomily thinking. Once more they traversed the groups who blocked the road. The exasperation was growing, the exasperation of a calm race, the muttered warning of a storm, without violent gestures, terrible to see above this solid mass. A few men, understanding accounts, had made calculations, and the two centimes gained by the company over the wood were rumored about and excited the hardest heads. But it was especially the rage over this disastrous pay, the rebellion of hunger against the rest days and the fines. Already there was not enough to eat, and what would happen if wages were still further lowered? In the *estaminets* the anger grew loud, and fury so dried their throats that the little money taken went over the counters.

From Montsou to the settlement Etienne and Maheu never exchanged a word. When the latter entered Maheude, who was alone with the children, noticed immediately that his hands were empty.

"Well, you're a nice one!" she said. "Where's my coffee and my sugar and the meat? A bit of veal wouldn't have ruined you."

He made no reply, stifled by the emotion he had been keeping back. Then the coarse face of this man, hardened to work in the mines, became swollen with despair, and large tears broke from his eyes and fell in a warm rain. He had thrown himself into a chair, weeping like a child and throwing fifty francs on the table.

"Here," he stammered. "That's what I've brought you back. That's our work for all of us."

Maheude looked at Etienne and saw that he was silent and overwhelmed. Then she also wept. How were nine people to live for a fortnight on fifty francs? Her eldest son had left them; the old man could no longer move his legs: it would soon mean death. Alzire threw herself round her mother's neck, overcome on hearing her weep. Estelle was howling; Lénore and Henri were sobbing.

And from the entire settlement there soon arose the same cry of wretchedness. The men had come back, and each household was lamenting the disaster of this bad pay. The doors opened; women appeared, crying aloud outside, as if their complaints could not be held beneath the ceilings of these small houses. A fine rain was falling, but they did not feel it; they called one another from the pavements; they showed one another in the hollow of their hands the money they had received.

"Look! They've given him this. Do they want to make fools of people?"

"As for me, see, I haven't got enough to pay for the fortnight's bread with."

"And just count mine! I should have to sell my shifts!"

Maheude had come out like the others. A group had formed around the Levaque woman, who was shouting loudest of all, for her drunkard of a husband had not even turned up, and she knew that, large or small, the pay would melt away at the Volcan. Philomène watched Maheu so that Zacharie should not get hold of the money. Pierronne was the only one who seemed fairly calm, for that hypocritical Pierron always arranged things—no one knew how—so as to have more hours on the captain's ticket than his mates. But Mother Brûlé thought this cowardly of her son-in-law; she was among the enraged, lean and erect in the midst of the group, with her fists stretched toward Montsou.

"To think," she cried without naming the Hennebeaus, "that this morning I saw their servant go by in a carriage! Yes, the cook in a carriage with two horses, going to Marchiennes to get fish, sure enough!"

A clamor arose, and the abuse began again. That servant in a white apron, taken to the market of the neighboring town in her master's carriage, aroused indignation. While the workers were dying of hunger they must have their fish, at all costs! Perhaps they would not always be able to eat their fish: the turn of the poor people would come. And the ideas sown by Etienne sprang up and expanded in this cry of revolt. It was impatience before the promised age of gold, a haste to get a share of the happiness beyond this horizon of misery, closed in like the grave. The injustice was becoming too great; at last they would demand their rights, since the bread was being taken out of their mouths. The women especially would have liked at once to take by assault this ideal city of progress in which there was to be no more wretchedness. It was almost night, and the rain increased while they were still filling the settlement with their tears in the midst of the screaming helter-skelter of the children.

That evening at the Avantage the strike was decided on. Rasseneur no longer struggled against it, and Souvarine accepted it as a first step. Etienne summed up the situation in a word: if the company really wanted a strike then the company should have a strike.

CHAPTER V

A WEEK PASSED and work went on suspiciously and mournfully in expectation of the conflict.

Among the Maheus the fortnight threatened to be more meager than ever. Maheude grew bitter in spite of her moderation and good sense. Her daughter Catherine, too, had taken it into her head to stay out one night. On the following morning she came back so weary and ill after this adventure that she was not able to go to the pit, and she told with tears how it was not her fault, for Chaval had kept her, threatening to beat her if she ran away. He was becoming mad with jealousy and wished to prevent her from returning to Etienne's bed, where he well knew, he said, that the family made her sleep. Maheude was furious and, after forbidding her daughter ever to see such a brute again, talked

of going to Montsou to box his ears. But all the same, it was a day lost, and the girl, now that she had this lover, preferred not to change him.

Two days after there was another incident. On Monday and Tuesday Jeanlin, who was supposed to be quietly engaged in his task at the Voreux, had escaped to run away into the marshes and the forest of Vandame with Bébert and Lydie. He had seduced them; no one knew to what plunder or to what games of precocious children they had all three given themselves up. He received a vigorous punishment, a whipping which his mother applied to him on the pavement outside, before the terrified children of the settlement. Who could have thought such a thing of children belonging to her, who had cost so much since their birth and who ought now to be bringing something in? And in this cry there was the remembrance of her own hard youth, of the hereditary misery which made of each little one in the brood a breadwinner later on.

That morning, when the men and the girl set out for the pit, Maheude sat up in her bed to say to Jeanlin:

"You know that if you begin that game again, you little beast, I'll take the skin off your bottom!"

In the Maheus' new stall the work was hard. This part of the Filonnière seam was so thin that the pikemen, squeezed between the wall and the roof, grazed their elbows at their work. It was, too, becoming very damp; from hour to hour they feared a rush of water, one of those sudden torrents which burst through rocks and carry away men. The day before, as Etienne was violently driving in his pick and drawing it out, he had received a jet of water in his face, but this was only an alarm; the cutting had simply become damper and more unwholesome. Besides, he now thought nothing of possible accidents; he forgot himself there with his mates, careless of peril. They lived in firedamp without even feeling its weight on their eyelids, the spider-web veil which it left on the eyelashes. Sometimes when the flame of the lamps grew paler and bluer than usual it attracted attention, and a miner would put his head against the seam to listen to the low noise of the gas, a noise of air bubbles escaping from each crack. But the constant threat was of landslips; for, besides the insufficiency of the timbering, always patched up too quickly, the soil, soaked with water, would not hold.

Three times during the day Maheu had been obliged to add to the planking. It was half-past two, and the men would soon have to ascend. Lying on his side, Etienne was finishing the cutting of a block when a distant growl of thunder shook the whole mine.

"What's that then?" he cried, putting down his ax to listen.

He had at first thought that the gallery was falling in behind his back.

But Maheu had already glided along the slope of the cutting, saying:

"It's a fall! Quick, quick!"

All tumbled down and hastened, carried away by a restless movement of fraternity. Their lamps danced at their wrists in the deathly silence which had fallen; they rushed in single file along the passages with bent backs, as though they were galloping on all fours; and without slowing this gallop they asked each other questions and threw brief replies. Where was it then? In the cuttings,

perhaps. No, it came from below; no, from the haulage. When they arrived at the chimney passage they threw themselves into it, tumbling one over the other without troubling about bruises.

Jeanlin, with skin still red from the whipping of the day before, had not run away from the pit on this day. He was trotting with naked feet behind his train, closing the ventilation doors one by one; when he was not afraid of meeting a captain he jumped onto the last tram, which he was not allowed to do for fear he should go to sleep. But his great amusement was, whenever the train was shunted, to let another one pass, to go and join Bébert, who was holding the reins in front. He would come up slyly without his lamp and vigorously pinch his companion, inventing mischievous monkey tricks, with his yellow hair, his large ears, his lean muzzle, lit up by little green eyes shining in the darkness. With morbid precocity he seemed to have the obscure intelligence and the quick skill of a human abortion which had returned to its animal ways.

In the afternoon Mouque brought Bataille, whose turn it was, to the trammers; and as the horse was snuffing in the shunting, Jeanlin, who had glided up to Bébert, asked him:

"What's the matter with the old hack to stop short like that? He'll break my legs."

Bébert could not reply; he had to hold in Bataille, who was growing lively at the approach of the other train. The horse had smelled from afar his comrade Trompette, for whom he had felt great tenderness ever since the day when he had seen him disembarked in the pit. One might say that it was the affectionate pity of an old philosopher anxious to console a young friend by imparting to him his own resignation and patience, for Trompette did not become reconciled, drawing his trams without any taste for the work, standing with lowered head, blinded by the darkness and forever regretting the sun. So every time that Bataille met him he put out his head, snorting, and moistened him with an encouraging caress.

"By God!" swore Bébert. "There they are, licking each other's skins again!"

Then when Trompette had passed he replied, on the subject of Bataille:

"Oh, he's a cunning old beast! When he stops like that it's because he guesses there's something in the way, a stone or a hole, and he takes care of himself; he doesn't want to break his bones. Today I don't know what was the matter with him down there after the door. He pushed it and stood stock-still. Did you see anything?"

"No," said Jeanlin. "There's water; I've got it up to my knees."

The train set out again. And on the following journey, when he had opened the ventilation door with a blow from his head, Bataille again refused to advance, neighing and trembling. At last he made up his mind and set off with a bound.

Jeanlin, who closed the door, had remained behind. He bent down and looked at the mud through which he was paddling, then raising his lamp, he saw that the wood had given way beneath the continual bleeding of a spring. Just then a pikeman, one Berloque, who was called Chicot, had arrived from his cutting, in a hurry to go to his wife who had just been confined. He also stopped and

examined the planking. And suddenly, as the boy was starting to rejoin his train, a tremendous cracking sound was heard, and a landslip engulfed the man and the child.

There was deep silence. A thick dust raised by the wind of the fall passed through the passages. Blinded and choked, the miners came from every part, even from the farthest stalls, with their dancing lamps which feebly lighted up this gallop of black men at the bottom of these molehills. When the first men tumbled against the landslip they shouted out and called their mates. A second band, come from the cutting below, found themselves on the other side of the mass of earth which stopped up the gallery. It was at once seen that the roof had fallen in for a dozen meters at most. The damage was not serious. But all hearts were contracted when a death rattle was heard from the ruins.

Bébert, leaving his train, ran up, repeating:

"Jeanlin is underneath! Jeanlin is underneath!"

Maheu, at this very moment, had come out of the passage with Zacharie and Etienne. He was seized with the fury of despair and could only utter oaths.

"My God! My God! My God!"

Catherine, Lydie and Mouquette, who had also rushed up, began to sob and shriek with terror in the midst of the fearful disorder, which was increased by the darkness. The men tried to make them be silent, but they shrieked louder as each groan was heard.

The captain, Richomme, had come up running, in despair that neither Négrel, the engineer, nor Dansaert were at the pit. With his ear pressed against the rocks he listened and at last said that those sounds could not come from a child. A man must certainly be there. Maheu had already called Jeanlin twenty times over. Not a breath was heard. The little one must have been smashed up.

And still the groans continued monotonously. They spoke to the agonized man, asking him his name. The groaning alone replied.

"Look sharp!" repeated Richomme, who had already organized a rescue. "We can talk afterward."

From each end the miners attacked the landslip with pick and shovel. Chaval worked without a word beside Maheu and Etienne, while Zacharie superintended the removal of the earth. The hour for ascent had come, and no one had touched food, but they could not go up for their soup while their mates were in peril. They realized, however, that the settlement would be disturbed if no one came back, and it was proposed to send off the women. But neither Catherine nor Mouquette nor even Lydie would move, nailed to the spot with a desire to know what had happened and to help. Levaque then accepted the commission of announcing the landslip—a simple accident, which was being repaired. It was nearly four o'clock; in less than an hour the men had done a day's work; half the earth would have already been removed if more rocks had not slid from the roof. Maheu persisted with such energy that he refused with a furious gesture when another man approached to relieve him for a moment.

"Gently!" said Richomme at last. "We are getting near. We must not finish them off."

In fact, the groaning was becoming more and more distinct. It was a con-

tinuous rattling which guided the workers, and now it seemed to be beneath their very picks. Suddenly it stopped.

In silence they all looked at one another and shuddered as they felt the coldness of death pass in the darkness. They dug on, soaked in sweat, their muscles tense to breaking. They came upon a foot and then began to remove the earth with their hands, freeing the limbs one by one. The head was not hurt. They turned their lamps on it, and Chicot's name went round. He was quite warm, with his spinal column broken by a rock.

"Wrap him up in a covering and put him in a tram," ordered the captain. "Now for the lad; look sharp."

Maheu gave a last blow, and an opening was made, communicating with the men who were clearing away the soil from the other side. They shouted out that they had just found Jeanlin, unconscious, with both legs broken, still breathing. It was the father who took up the little one in his arms with clenched jaws, constantly uttering, "My God!" to express his grief, while Catherine and the other women again began to shriek.

A procession was quickly formed. Bébert had brought back Bataille, who was harnessed to the trams. In the first lay Chicot's corpse, supported by Etienne; in the second Maheu was seated with Jeanlin, still unconscious, on his knees, covered by a strip of wool torn from the ventilation door. They started at a walking pace. On each tram was a lamp like a red star. Then behind followed the row of miners, some fifty shadows in single file. Now that they were overcome by fatigue they trailed their feet, slipping in the mud with the mournful melancholy of a flock stricken by an epidemic. It took them nearly half an hour to reach the pit eye. This procession beneath the earth, in the midst of deep darkness, seemed never to end through galleries which bifurcated and turned and unrolled.

At the pit eye Richomme, who had gone on before, had ordered an empty cage to be reserved. Pierron immediately loaded the two trams. In the first Maheu remained with his wounded little one on his knees, while in the other Etienne kept Chicot's corpse between his arms to hold it up. When the men had piled themselves up in the other decks the cage rose. It took two minutes. The rain from the tubbing fell very cold, and the men looked up toward the air, impatient to see daylight.

Fortunately a trammer sent to Dr Vanderhagen's had found him and brought him back. Jeanlin and the dead man were placed in the captain's room, where from year's end to year's end a large fire burned. A row of buckets with warm water was ready for washing feet, and after having spread two mattresses on the floor the man and the child were placed on them. Maheu and Etienne alone entered. Outside putters, miners and boys were running about, forming groups and talking in a low voice.

As soon as the doctor had glanced at Chicot:

"Done for! You can wash him."

Two overseers undressed and then washed with a sponge this corpse blackened with coal and still dirty with the sweat of work.

"Nothing wrong with the head," said the doctor again, kneeling on Jeanlin's mattress. "Nor the chest either. Ah! It's the legs which have given."

He himself undressed the child, unfastening the cap, taking off the jacket, drawing off the breeches and shirt with the skill of a nurse. And the poor little body appeared, as lean as an insect, stained with black dust and yellow earth, marbled by bloody patches. Nothing could be made out, and they had to wash him also. He seemed to grow leaner beneath the sponge, the flesh so pallid and transparent that one could see the bones. It was a pity to look on this last degeneration of a wretched race, this mere nothing that was suffering and half crushed by the falling of the rocks. When he was clean they perceived the bruises on the thighs, two red patches on the white skin.

Jeanlin, awaking from his faint, moaned. Standing up at the foot of the mattress with hands hanging down, Maheu was looking at him and large tears rolled from his eyes.

"Eh, are you the father?" said the doctor, raising his eyes. "No need to cry then; you can see he is not dead. Help me instead."

He found two simple fractures. But the right leg gave him some anxiety; it would probably have to be cut off.

At this moment the engineer, Négrel, and Dansaert, who had been informed, came up with Richomme. The first listened to the captain's narrative with an exasperated air. He broke out: "Always this cursed timbering!" Had he not repeated a hundred times that they would leave their men down there?—and those brutes who talked about going out on strike if they were forced to timber more solidly! The worst was that now the company would have to pay for the broken pots. M. Hennebeau would be pleased!

"Who is it?" he asked of Dansaert, who was standing in silence before the corpse which was being wrapped up in a sheet.

"Chicot! One of our good workers," replied the chief captain. "He has three children. Poor chap!"

Dr Vanderhagen ordered Jeanlin's immediate removal to his parents'. Six o'clock struck; twilight was already coming on, and they would do well to remove the corpse also; the engineer gave orders to harness the van and to bring a stretcher. The wounded child was placed on the stretcher while the mattress and the dead body were put into the van.

Some putters were still standing at the door, talking with some miners who were waiting about to look on. When the captain's room opened there was silence in the group. A new procession was then formed, the van in front, then the stretcher and then the train of people. They left the mine square and went slowly up the road to the settlement. The first November cold had denuded the immense plain; the night was now slowly burying it like a shroud fallen from the livid sky.

Etienne then in a low voice advised Maheu to send Catherine on to warn Maheude so as to soften the blow. The overwhelmed father, who was following the stretcher, agreed with a nod, and the young girl set out running, for they were now near. But the van, that gloomy, well-known box, was

already signaled. Women ran out wildly onto the paths; three or four rushed about in anguish without their bonnets. Soon there were thirty of them, then fifty, all choking with the same terror. Then someone was dead? Who was it? The story told by Levaque, after first reassuring them, now exaggerated their nightmare: it was not one man; it was ten who had perished and who were now being brought back in the van one by one.

Catherine found her mother agitated by a presentiment, and after hearing the first stammered words Maheude cried:

"The father's dead!"

The young girl protested in vain, speaking of Jeanlin. Without hearing her, Maheude had rushed forward. And on seeing the van, which was passing before the church, she grew faint and pale. The women at their doors, mute with terror, were stretching out their necks, while others followed, trembling as they wondered before whose house the procession would stop.

The vehicle passed, and behind it Maheude saw Maheu, who was accompanying the stretcher. Then when they had placed the stretcher at her door and when she saw Jeanlin alive with his legs broken, there was so sudden a reaction in her that she choked with anger, stammering, without tears:

"Is this it? They cripple our little ones now! Both legs! My God! What do they want me to do with him?"

"Be still then," said Dr Vanderhagen, who had followed to attend to Jeanlin. "Would you rather he had remained below?"

But Maheude grew more furious, while Alzire, Lénore and Henri were crying around her. As she helped to carry up the wounded boy and to give the doctor what he needed, she cursed fate and asked where she was to find money to feed invalids. The old man was not then enough, and now this rascal, too, had lost his legs! And she never ceased, while other cries, more heartbreaking lamentations, were heard from a neighboring house: Chicot's wife and children were weeping over the body. It was now quite night; the exhausted miners were at last eating their soup, and the settlement had fallen into melancholy silence, only disturbed by these loud outcries.

Three weeks passed. It was found possible to avoid amputation; Jeanlin kept both his legs, but he remained lame. On investigation the company had resigned itself to giving a donation of fifty francs. It had also promised to find employment for the little invalid at the surface as soon as he was well. All the same their misery was aggravated, for the father had received such a shock that he was seriously ill with fever.

Since Thursday Maheu had been back at the pit, and it was now Sunday. In the evening Étienne talked of the approaching date of the first of December, preoccupied in wondering if the company would execute its threat. They sat up till ten o'clock, waiting for Catherine, who must have been delaying with Chaval. But she did not return. Maheude furiously bolted the door without a word. Étienne was long in going to sleep, restless at the thought of that empty bed in which Alzire occupied so little room.

Next morning she was still absent, and it was only in the afternoon, on returning from the pit, that the Maheus learned that Chaval was keeping

Catherine. He created such abominable scenes with her that she had decided to stay with him. To avoid reproaches he had suddenly left the Voreux and had been taken on at Jean-Bart, M. Deneulin's mine, and she had followed him as a putter. The new household still inhabited Montsou, at Piquette's.

Maheu at first talked of going to fight the man and of bringing his daughter back with a kick in the backside. Then he made a gesture of resignation: what was the good? It always turned out like that; one could not prevent a girl from sticking to a man when she wanted to. It was much better to wait quietly for the marriage. But Maheude did not take things so easily.

"Did I beat her when she took this Chaval?" she cried to Etienne, who listened in silence, very pale. "See now, tell me, you who are a sensible man. We have left her free, haven't we? because, my God, they all come to it. Now I was in the family way when the father married me. But I didn't run away from my parents, and I should never have done so dirty a trick as to carry the money I earned to a man who had no want of it. Ah, it's disgusting, you know. People will leave off getting children!"

And as Etienne still replied only by nodding his head, she insisted:

"A girl who went out every evening where she wanted to! What has she got in her skin, then, not to be able to wait till I married her after she had helped to get us out of difficulties? Eh? It's natural; one has a daughter to work. But there, we have been too good; we ought not to let her go and amuse herself with a man. Give them an inch and they take an ell."

Alzire nodded approvingly. Lénore and Henri, overcome by this storm, cried quietly, while the mother now enumerated their misfortunes: first Zacharie, who had to get married; then old Bonnemort, who was there on his chair with his twisted feet; then Jeanlin, who could not leave the room for ten days, with his badly united bones, and now, as a last blow, this jade Catherine, who had gone away with a man! The whole family was breaking up. There was only the father left at the pit. How were they to live, seven persons without counting Estelle, on his three francs? They might as well jump into the canal in a band.

"It won't do any good to worry yourself," said Maheu in a low voice. "Perhaps we have not got to the end."

Etienne, who was looking fixedly at the flags on the floor, raised his head and murmured with eyes lost in a vision of the future:

"Ah, it is time! It is time!"

PART FOUR

CHAPTER I

ON THAT MONDAY the Hennebeaus had invited the Grégoires and their daughter Cécile to lunch. They had formed their plans: on rising from table Paul Négrel was to take the ladies to a mine, St Thomas, which had been luxuri-

ously reinstalled. But this was only an amiable pretext; this party was an invention of Mme Hennebeau's to hasten the marriage of Cécile and Paul.

Suddenly on this very Monday, at four o'clock in the morning, the strike broke out. When on the first of December the company had adopted the new wage system, the miners remained calm. At the end of the fortnight not one made the least protest on payday. Everybody, from the manager down to the last overseer, considered the tariff as accepted, and great was their surprise in the morning at this declaration of war, made with a tactical unity which seemed to indicate energetic leadership.

At five o'clock Dansaert woke M. Hennebeau to inform him that not a single man had gone down at the Voreux. The settlement of the Deux-Cent-Quarante, which he had passed through, was sleeping deeply with closed windows and doors. And as soon as the manager had jumped out of bed, his eyes still swollen with sleep, he was overwhelmed. Every quarter of an hour messengers came in and dispatches fell on his desk as thick as hail. At first he hoped that the revolt was limited to the Voreux, but the news became more serious every minute. There was the Mirou, the Crèveœur, the Madeleine, where only the grooms had appeared; the Victoire and Feutry-Cantel, the two best-disciplined pits, where the men had been reduced by a third; St Thomas alone numbered all its people and seemed to be outside the movement. Up to nine o'clock he dictated dispatches, telegraphing in all directions, to the prefect of Lille, to the directors of the company, warning the authorities and asking for orders. He had sent Négrel to go round the neighboring pits to obtain precise information.

Suddenly M. Hennebeau recollected the lunch, and he was about to send the coachman to tell the Grégoires that the party had been put off when a certain hesitation and lack of will stopped him—the man who in a few brief phrases had just made military preparations for a field of battle. He went up to Mme Hennebeau, whose hair had just been done by her lady's maid in her dressing room.

"Ah, they are on strike," she said quietly when he had told her. "Well, what has that to do with us? We are not going to leave off eating, I suppose?"

And she was obstinate; it was vain to tell her that the lunch would be disturbed and that the visit to St Thomas could not take place. She found an answer to everything. Why lose a lunch that was already cooking? And as to visiting the pit, they could give that up afterward if the walk was really imprudent.

"Besides," she added when the maid had gone out, "you know that I am anxious to receive these good people. This marriage ought to affect you more than the follies of your men. I want to have it; don't contradict me."

He looked at her, agitated by a slight trembling, and the hard, firm face of the man of discipline expressed the secret grief of a wounded heart. She had remained with naked shoulders, already overmature but still imposing and desirable with the broad bust of a Ceres gilded by the autumn. For a moment he felt a brutal desire to seize her and to roll his head between the breasts she was exposing in this warm room, which exhibited the private luxury of a

sensual woman and which had about it an irritating perfume of musk, but he recoiled; for ten years they had occupied separate rooms.

"Good!" he said, leaving her. "Do not make any alterations."

M. Hennebeau had been born in the Ardennes. In his early life he had undergone the hardships of a poor boy thrown as an orphan on the Paris streets. After having painfully followed the courses of the *Ecole des Mines*, at the age of twenty-four he had gone to the Grand Combe as engineer to the Sainte-Barbe mine. Three years later he became divisional engineer in the Pas-de-Calais, at the Marles mines. It was there that he married, wedding, by one of those strokes of fortune which are the rule among the *Corps des Mines*, the daughter of the rich owner of a spinning factory at Arras. For fifteen years they lived in the small provincial town, and no event broke the monotony of existence, not even the birth of a child. An increasing irritation detached Mme Hennebeau, who had been brought up to respect money and was disdainful of this husband who gained a small salary with such difficulty and who enabled her to gratify none of the satisfactions of vanity which she had dreamed of at school. He was a man of strict honesty, who never speculated but stood at his post like a soldier. The lack of harmony had only increased, aggravated by one of those curious misunderstandings of the flesh which freeze the most ardent; he adored his wife; she had the sensuality of a greedy blonde, and already they slept apart, ill at ease and wounded. From that time she had a lover of whom he was ignorant. At last he left the Pas-de-Calais to occupy a situation in an office at Paris, with the idea that she would be grateful to him. But Paris only completed their separation, that Paris which she had desired since her first doll and where she washed away her provincialism in a week, becoming a woman of fashion at once and throwing herself into all the luxurious follies of the period. The ten years which she spent there were filled by a great passion, a public intrigue with a man whose desertion nearly killed her. This time the husband had not been able to keep his ignorance, and after some abominable scenes he resigned himself, disarmed by the quiet unconsciousness of this woman who took her happiness where she found it. It was after the rupture and when he saw that she was ill with grief that he had accepted the management of the Montsou mines, still hoping also that she would reform down there in that desolate black country.

The Hennebeaus, since they had lived at Montsou, returned to the irritated boredom of their early marriage days. At first she seemed consoled by the great quiet, soothed by the flat monotony of the immense plain; she buried herself in it as a woman who has done with the world; she affected a dead heart, so detached from life that she did not even mind growing stout. Then beneath this indifference a final fever declared itself, the need to live once more, and she deluded herself for six months by organizing and furnishing to her taste the little villa belonging to the management. She said it was frightful and filled it with upholstery, bric-a-brac and all sorts of artistic luxuries which were talked of as far as Lille. Now the country exasperated her, those stupid fields spread out to infinity, those eternal black roads without a tree, swarm-

ing with a horrid population which disgusted and frightened her. Complaints of exile began; she accused her husband of having sacrificed her to a salary of forty thousand francs, a trifle which hardly sufficed to keep the house up. Why could he not imitate others, demand a part for himself, obtain shares, succeed in something at last? And she insisted with the cruelty of an heiress who has brought her own fortune. He, always restrained and taking refuge in the deceptive coldness of a man of business, was torn by desire for this creature, one of those late desires which are so violent and which increase with age. He had never possessed her as a lover; he was haunted by a continual image, to have her once to himself as she had given herself to another. Every morning he dreamed of winning her in the evening; then when she looked at him with her cold eyes and when he felt that everything within her denied itself to him he even avoided touching her hand. It was a suffering without possible cure, hidden beneath the stiffness of his attitude, the suffering of a tender nature in secret anguish at the lack of domestic happiness. At the end of six months, when the house, being definitely furnished, no longer occupied Mme Hennebeau, she fell into the languor of boredom, a victim who was being killed by exile and who said that she was glad to die of it.

Just then Paul Nègre landed at Montsou. His mother, the widow of a Provence captain, living at Avignon on a slender income, had had to content herself with bread and water to enable him to reach the Ecole Polytechnique. He had come out low in rank, and his uncle, M. Hennebeau, had enabled him to leave by offering to take him as engineer at the Voreux. From that time he was treated as one of the family; he even had his room there, his meals there, lived there, and was thus enabled to send to his mother half his salary of three thousand francs. To disguise this kindness M. Hennebeau spoke of the embarrassment to a young man of setting up a household in one of those little villas reserved for the mine engineers. Mme Hennebeau had at once taken the part of a good aunt, treating her nephew with familiarity and watching over his comfort. During the first months, especially, she exhibited an overwhelming maternity with her advice regarding the smallest subjects. But she remained a woman, however, and slid into personal confidences. This lad, so young and so practical, with his unscrupulous intelligence, professing a philosopher's theory of love, amused her with the vivacity of the pessimism which had sharpened his thin face and pointed nose. One evening he naturally found himself in her arms, and she seemed to give herself up out of kindness, while saying to him that she had no heart left and wished only to be his friend. In fact, she was not jealous; she joked him about the putters, whom he declared to be abominable, and she almost sulked because he had no young man's pranks to narrate to her. Then she was carried away by the idea of getting him married; she dreamed of sacrificing herself and of finding a rich girl for him. Their relations continued, a plaything, a recreation in which she felt the last tenderness of a lazy woman who had done with the world.

Two years had passed by. One night M. Hennebeau had a suspicion when he heard naked feet passing his door. But this new adventure revolted him, in his own house, between this mother and this son! And, besides, on the fol-

lowing day his wife spoke to him about the choice of Cécile Grégoire which she had made for her nephew. She occupied herself over this marriage with such ardor that he blushed at his own monstrous imagination. He only felt gratitude toward the young man who, since his arrival, had made the house less melancholy.

As he came down from the dressing room M. Hennebeau found that Paul, who had just returned, was in the vestibule. He seemed to be quite amused by the story of this strike.

"Well?" asked his uncle.

"Well, I've been round the settlements. They seem to be quite sensible in there. I think they will first send you a deputation."

But at that moment Mme Hennebeau's voice called from the first story:

"Is that you, Paul? Come up then and tell me the news. How queer they are to make such a fuss, these people who are so happy!"

And the manager had to renounce further information, since his wife had taken his messenger. He returned and sat before his desk, on which a new packet of dispatches was placed.

At eleven o'clock the Grégoires arrived and were astonished when Hippolyte, the footman who was placed as sentinel, hustled them in after an anxious glance at the two ends of the road. The drawing-room curtains were drawn, and they were taken at once into the study, where M. Hennebeau apologized for their reception, but the drawing room looked over the street, and it was undesirable to seem to offer provocations.

"What! You don't know?" he went on, seeing their surprise.

M. Grégoire, when he heard that the strike had at last broken out, shrugged his shoulders in his placid way. Bah! It would be nothing; the people were honest. With a movement of her chin Mme Grégoire approved his confidence in the everlasting resignation of the colliers, while Cécile, who was very cheerful that day, feeling that she looked well in her capucine-cloth costume, smiled at the word "strike," which reminded her of visits to the settlements and the distribution of charities.

Mme Hennebeau now appeared in black silk, followed by Négrel.

"Ah, isn't it annoying?" she said at the door. "As if they couldn't wait, those men! You know that Paul refuses to take us to St Thomas."

"We can stay here," said M. Grégoire obligingly. "We shall be quite pleased."

Paul had contented himself by formally saluting Cécile and her mother. Angry at this lack of demonstrativeness, his aunt sent him with a look to the young girl, and when she heard them laughing together she enveloped them in a maternal glance.

M. Hennebeau, however, finished reading his dispatches and prepared a few replies. They talked near him; his wife explained that she had not paid attention to this study, which, in fact, retained its faded old red paper, its heavy mahogany furniture, its cardboard boxes, scratched by use. Three quarters of an hour passed, and they were about to seat themselves at table when the footman announced M. Deneulin. He entered in an excited way and bowed to Mme Hennebeau.

"Ah, you here?" he said, seeing the Grégoires.

And he quickly spoke to the manager:

"It has come then? I just heard of it through my engineer. With me, all the men went down this morning. But the thing may spread. I'm not at all at ease. How is it with you?"

He had arrived on horseback, and his anxiety betrayed itself in his loud speech and emphatic gesture, which made him resemble a retired cavalry officer.

M. Hennebeau was beginning to inform him regarding the precise situation, when Hippolyte opened the dining-room door. Then he interrupted himself to say:

"Lunch with us. I will tell you more at dessert."

"Yes, as you please," replied Deneulin, so full of his thoughts that he accepted without ceremony.

He was, however, conscious of his impoliteness and turned toward Mme Hennebeau with apologies. She was very charming, however. When she had had a seventh plate laid she placed her guests: Mme Grégoire and Cécile by her husband, then M. Grégoire and Deneulin at her own right and left, then Paul, whom she put between the young girl and her father. As they attacked the hors d'œuvre she said with a smile:

"You must excuse me; I wanted to give you oysters. On Monday, you know, there was an arrival of Ostend oysters at Marchiennes, and I meant to send the cook with the carriage. But she was afraid of being stoned—"

They all interrupted her with a great burst of gaiety. They thought the story very funny.

"Hush!" said M. Hennebeau, vexed, looking at the windows, through which the road could be seen. "We need not tell the whole country that we have company this morning."

"Well, here is a slice of sausage which they shan't have," M. Grégoire declared.

The laughter began again, but with greater restraint. Each guest made himself comfortable in this room upholstered with Flemish tapestry and furnished with old oak chests. The silver shone behind the panes of the sideboards, and polished surfaces of red copper reflected a palm and an aspidistra growing in majolica pots. Outside the December day was frozen by a keen northeast wind. But not a breath of it entered; a greenhouse warmth developed the delicate odor of the pineapple, which was cut in a crystal bowl.

"Suppose we were to draw the curtains," proposed Négrel, who was amused at the idea of frightening the Grégoires.

The housemaid, who was helping the footman, treated this as an order and went and closed one of the curtains. This led to interminable jokes: not a glass or a plate could be put down without precaution; every dish was hailed as a waif escaped from the pillage in a conquered town, and behind this forced gaiety there was a certain fear which betrayed itself in involuntary glances toward the road, as though a band of starvelings were watching the table from outside.

After the scrambled eggs with truffles trout came on. The conversation then turned to the industrial crisis, which had become aggravated during the last eighteen months.

"It was inevitable," said Denculin; "the excessive prosperity of recent years was bound to bring us to it. Think of the enormous capital which has been sunk, the railways, harbors and canals, all the money buried in the maddest speculations. Among us alone sugarworks have been set up as if the department could furnish three beetroot harvests. Good heavens! And today money is scarce, and we have to wait to catch up the interest of the expended millions; so there is a mortal congestion and a final stagnation of business."

M. Hennebeau disputed this theory, but he agreed that the fortunate years had spoiled the men.

"When I think," he exclaimed, "that these chaps in our pits used to gain six francs a day, double what they gain now! And they lived well, too, and acquired luxurious tastes. Today, naturally, it seems hard to them to go back to their old frugality."

"Monsieur Grégoire," interrupted Mme Hennebeau, "let me persuade you—a little more trout. They are delicious, are they not?"

The manager went on:

"But as a matter of fact, is it our fault? We, too, are cruelly struck. Since the factories have closed one by one, we have had a deuce of a difficulty in getting rid of our stock, and in face of the growing reduction in demand we have been forced to lower our net prices. It is just this that the men won't understand."

There was silence. The footman presented roast partridge, while the housemaid began to pour out chambertin for the guests.

"There has been a famine in India," said Deneulin in a low voice, as though he were speaking to himself. "America, by ceasing to order iron, has struck a heavy blow at our furnaces. Everything holds together; a distant shock is enough to disturb the world—and the empire, which was so proud of this hot fever of industry!"

He attacked his partridge wing. Then, raising his voice:

"The worst is that to lower the net prices we ought logically to produce more; otherwise the reduction bears on wages, and the worker is right in saying that he has to pay the damage."

This confession, the outcome of his frankness, raised a discussion. The ladies were not at all interested. Besides, all were occupied with their plates in the first zest of appetite. When the footman came back he seemed about to speak; then he hesitated.

"What is it?" asked M. Hennebeau. "If there are letters give them to me. I am expecting replies."

"No sir. It is Monsieur Dansaert, who is in the porch. But he doesn't wish to disturb you."

The manager excused himself and had the head captain brought in. The latter stood upright a few paces from the table, while all turned to see him, swollen and out of breath with the news he was bringing. The settlements

were quiet; only it was now decided to send a deputation. It would, perhaps, be there in a few minutes.

"Very well; thank you," said M. Hennebeau. "I want a report morning and evening, you understand."

And as soon as Dansaert had gone they began to joke again and hastened to attack the Russian salad, declaring that not a moment was to be lost if they wished to finish it. The mirth was unbounded when Négrel having asked the housemaid for bread, she replied, "Yes sir," in a voice so low and terrified as if she had behind her a troop ready for murder and rape.

"You may speak," said Mme Hennebeau complacently. "They are not here yet."

The manager, who now received a packet of letters and dispatches, wished to read one of his letters aloud. It was from Pierron, who in respectful phrases gave notice that he was obliged to go out on strike with his comrades in order to avoid ill-treatment, and he added that he had not even been able to avoid taking part in the deputation, although he blamed that step.

"So much for liberty of work!" exclaimed M. Hennebeau.

Then they returned to the strike and asked him his opinion.

"Oh," he replied, "we have had them before. It will be a week or, at most, a fortnight of idleness, as it was last time. They will go and wallow in the public houses, and then when they are hungry they will go back to the pits."

Deneulin shook his head:

"I'm not so satisfied; this time they appear to be better organized. Have they not a provident fund?"

"Yes, scarcely three thousand francs. What do you think they can do with that? I suspect a man called Etienne Lantier of being their leader. He is a good workman; it would vex me to have to give him his certificate back, as we did of old to the famous Rasseneur, who still poisons the Voreux with his ideas and his beer. No matter, in a week half the men will have gone down, and in a fortnight the ten thousand will be below."

He was convinced. His only anxiety was concerning his own possible disgrace should the directors put the responsibility of the strike on him. For some time he had felt that he was diminishing in favor. So leaving the spoonful of Russian salad which he had taken, he read over again the dispatches received from Paris, endeavoring to penetrate every word. His guests excused him; the meal was becoming a military lunch, eaten on the field of battle before the first shots were fired.

The ladies then joined in the conversation. Mme Grégoire expressed pity for the poor people who would suffer from hunger, and Cécile was already making plans for distributing gifts of bread and meat. But Mme Hennebeau was astonished at hearing of the wretchedness of the Montsou colliers. Were they not very fortunate? People who were lodged and warmed and cared for at the expense of the company! In her indifference for the herd she only knew the lessons she had learned and with which she had surprised the Parisians who came for a visit. She believed them at last and was indignant at the ingratitude of the people.

Négrel, meanwhile, continued to frighten M. Grégoire. Cécile did not displease him, and he was quite willing to marry her to be agreeable to his aunt, but he showed no amorous fever, like a youth of experience who, he said, was not easily carried away now. He professed to be a Republican, which did not prevent him from treating his men with extreme severity or from making fun of them in the company of the ladies.

"Nor have I my uncle's optimism, either," he continued. "I fear there will be serious disturbances. So I should advise you, Monsieur Grégoire, to lock up Pioline. They may pillage you."

Just then, still retaining the smile which illuminated his good-natured face, M. Grégoire was going beyond his wife in paternal sentiments with regard to the miners.

"Pillage me!" he cried, stupefied. "And why pillage me?"

"Are you not a shareholder in Montsou? You do nothing; you live on the work of others. In fact, you are an infamous capitalist, and that is enough. You may be sure that if the revolution triumphs it will force you to restore your fortune as stolen money."

At once he lost his childlike tranquillity, his serene unconsciousness. He stammered:

"Stolen money, my fortune! Did not my grandfather gain, and hardly, too, the sum originally invested? Have we not run all the risks of the enterprise, and do I today make a bad use of my income?"

Mme Hennebeau, alarmed at seeing the mother and daughter also white with fear, hastened to intervene, saying:

"Paul is joking, my dear sir."

But M. Grégoire was carried out of himself. As the servant was passing round the crabs he took three of them without knowing what he was doing and began to break their claws with his teeth.

"Ah, I don't say but what there are shareholders who abuse their position. For instance, I have been told that ministers have received shares from Montsou for services rendered to the company. It is like a nobleman whom I will not name, a duke, the biggest of our shareholders, whose life is a scandal of prodigality, millions thrown into the street on women, feasting and useless luxury. But we who live quietly, like good citizens as we are, who do not speculate, who are content to live wholesomely on what we have, giving a part to the poor! Come, now, your men must be mere brigands if they came and stole a pin from us!"

Négrel himself had to calm him, though amused at his anger. The crabs were still going round; the little crackling sound of their carapaces could be heard while the conversation turned to politics. M. Grégoire, in spite of everything and though still trembling, called himself a liberal and regretted Louis Philippe. As for Deneulin, he was for a strong government; he declared that the emperor was gliding down the slope of dangerous concessions.

"Remember '89," he said. "It was the nobility who made the Revolution possible, by their complicity and taste for philosophic novelties. Very well! The middle class today are playing the same silly game with their furious

liberalism, their rage for destruction, their flattery of the people. Yes, yes, you are sharpening the teeth of the monster that will devour us. It will devour us, rest assured!"

The ladies bid him be silent and tried to change the conversation by asking him news of his daughters. Lucie was at Marchiennes, where she was singing with a friend; Jeanne was painting an old beggar's head. But he said these things in a distracted way; he constantly looked at the manager, who was absorbed in the reading of his dispatches and forgetful of his guests. Behind those thin leaves he felt Paris and the directors' orders, which would decide the strike. At last he could not help yielding to his preoccupation.

"Well, what are you going to do?" he asked suddenly.

M. Hennebeau started, then turned off the question with a vague phrase.

"We shall see."

"No doubt you are solidly placed; you can wait," Deneulin began to think aloud. "But as for me, I shall be done for if the strike reaches Vandame. I shall have reinstalled Jean-Bart in vain; with a single pit I can only get along by constant production. Ah, I am not in a very pleasant situation, I can assure you!"

This involuntary confession seemed to strike M. Hennebeau. He listened, and a plan formed within him: in case the strike turned out badly, why not utilize it by letting things run down until his neighbor was ruined and then buy up his concession at a low price? That would be the surest way of regaining the good graces of the directors, who for years had dreamed of possessing Vandame.

"If Jean-Bart bothers you as much as that," he said, laughing, "why don't you give it up to us?"

But Deneulin was already regretting his complaints. He exclaimed:

"Never, never!"

They were amused at his vigor and had already forgotten the strike by the time the dessert appeared. An apple-charlotte meringue was overwhelmed with praise. Afterward the ladies discussed a recipe with respect to the pineapple, which was declared equally exquisite. The grapes and pears completed their happy abandonment at the end of this copious lunch. All talked excitedly at the same time, while the servant poured out Rhine wine in place of champagne, which was looked upon as commonplace.

And the marriage of Paul and Cécile certainly made a forward step in the sympathy produced by dessert. His aunt had thrown such urgent looks in his direction that the young man showed himself very amiable and in his knowing way reconquered the Grégoires, who had been cast down by his stories of pillage. For a moment M. Hennebeau, seeing the close understanding between his wife and his nephew, felt that abominable suspicion again revive, as if in this exchange of looks he had surprised a physical contact. But again the idea of the marriage, made here before his face, reassured him.

Hippolyte was serving the coffee when the housemaid entered in a fright.

"Sir, sir, they are here!"

It was the delegates. Doors banged; a breath of terror was passing through the neighboring rooms.

"Take them into the drawing room," said M. Hennebeau.

Around the table the guests were looking at one another with uneasy indecision. There was silence. Then they tried to resume their jokes: they pretended to put the rest of the sugar in their pockets and talked of hiding the plate. But the manager remained grave, and the laughter fell and their voices sank to a whisper, while the heavy feet of the delegates who were being shown in tramped over the carpet of the next room.

Mme Hennebeau said to her husband, lowering her voice:

"I hope you will drink your coffee."

"Certainly," he replied. "Let them wait."

He was nervous, listening to every sound, though apparently occupied with his cup.

Paul and Cécile got up, and he made her venture an eye to the keyhole. They were stifling their laughter and talking in a low voice.

"Do you see them?"

"Yes, I see a big man and two small ones behind."

"Haven't they ugly faces?"

"Not at all; they are very nice."

Suddenly M. Hennebeau left his chair, saying the coffee was too hot and he would drink it afterward. As he went out he placed a finger to his mouth to recommend prudence. They all sat down again and remained at table in silence, no longer daring to move, listening from afar with intent ears jarred by these coarse male voices.

CHAPTER II

THE PREVIOUS DAY, at a meeting held at Rasseneur's, Etienne and some comrades had chosen the delegates who were to proceed on the following day to the manager's house. When in the evening Maheude learned that her man was one of them, she was in despair and asked him if he wanted them to be thrown on the street. Maheu himself had agreed with reluctance. Both of them, when the moment of action came, in spite of the injustice of their wretchedness, fell back onto the resignation of their race, trembling before the morrow, preferring still to bend their backs to the yoke. In the management of affairs he usually gave way to his wife, whose advice was sound. This time, however, he grew angry at last, all the more so since he secretly shared her fears.

"Just leave me alone, will you?" he said, going to bed and turning his back. "A fine thing to leave the mates now! I'm doing my duty."

She went to bed in her turn. Neither of them spoke. Then after a long silence she replied:

"You're right; go. Only, poor old man, we are done for."

Midday struck while they were at lunch, for the rendezvous was at one

o'clock at the Avantage, from which they were to go together to M. Hennebeau's. They were eating potatoes. As there was only a small morsel of butter left, no one touched it. They would have bread and butter in the evening.

"You know that we reckon on you to speak," said Etienne suddenly to Maheu.

The latter was so overcome that he was silent from emotion.

"No, no! That's too much," cried Maheude. "I'm quite willing he should go there, but I don't allow him to go at the head. Why him, more than anyone else?"

Then Etienne, with his fiery eloquence, began to explain. Maheu was the best worker in the pit, the most liked and the most respected, whose good sense was always spoken of. In his mouth the miners' claims would carry decisive weight. At first Etienne had arranged to speak, but he had been at Montsou for too short a time. One who belonged to the country would be better listened to. In fact, the comrades were confiding their interests to the most worthy; he could not refuse; it would be cowardly.

Maheude made a gesture of despair.

"Go, go, my man; go and be killed for the others. I'm willing, after all!"

"But I could never do it," stammered Maheu. "I should do something stupid."

Etienne, glad to have persuaded him, struck him on the shoulder.

"Say what you feel and you won't go wrong."

Father Bonnemort, whose legs were now less swollen, was listening with his mouth full, shaking his head. There was silence. When potatoes were being eaten the children were subdued and behaved well. Then having swallowed his mouthful, the old man muttered slowly:

"You can say what you like, and it will be all the same as if you said nothing. Ah, I've seen these affairs; I've seen them! Forty years ago they drove us out of the manager's house, and with sabers too! Now they may receive you, perhaps, but they won't answer you any more than that wall. Lord, they have money; why should they care?"

There was silence again; Maheu and Etienne rose and left the family in gloom before the empty plates. On going out they called for Pierron and Levaque, and then all four went to Rasseneur's, where the delegates from the neighboring settlements were arriving in little groups. When the twenty members of the deputation had assembled there they settled on the terms to be opposed to the company's and then set out for Montsou. The keen north-east wind was sweeping the street. As they arrived it struck two.

At first the servant told them to wait and shut the door on them; then when he came back he introduced them into the drawing room and opened the curtains. A soft daylight entered, sifted through the lace. And the miners, when left alone, in their embarrassment did not dare to sit, all of them very clean, dressed in cloth, shaven that morning with their yellow hair and mustaches. They twisted their caps between their fingers and looked sideways at the furniture, which was in every variety of style, as a result of the taste for the old-fashioned: Henry II easy chairs, Louis XV chairs, an Italian cabinet of the

seventeenth century, a Spanish *contador* of the fifteenth century, with an altar front serving as a chimney piece, and ancient chasuble trimming reapplied to the curtains. This old gold and these old silks, with their rawny tones, all this luxurious church furniture, had overwhelmed them with respectful discomfort. The Eastern carpets with their long wool seemed to bind their feet. But what especially suffocated them was the heat, heat like that of a hot-air stove, which surprised them as they felt it with cheeks frozen from the wind of the road. Five minutes passed by, and their awkwardness increased in the comfort of this rich room, so pleasantly warm. At last M. Hennebeau entered, buttoned up in a military manner and wearing on his frock coat the correct little knot of his decoration. He spoke first.

"Ah, here you are! You are in rebellion, it seems."

He interrupted himself to add with polite stiffness:

"Sit down, I desire nothing better than to talk things over."

The miners turned round, looking for seats. A few of them ventured to place themselves on chairs, while the others, disturbed by the embroidered silks, preferred to remain standing.

There was a period of silence. M. Hennebeau, who had drawn his easy chair up to the fireplace, was rapidly looking them over and endeavoring to recall their faces. He had recognized Pierron, who was hidden in the last row, and his eyes rested on Etienne, who was seated in front of him.

"Well," he asked, "what have you to say to me?"

He had expected to hear the young man speak and he was so surprised to see Maheu come forward that he could not avoid adding again:

"What, you, a good workman who has always been so sensible, one of the old Montsou people whose family has worked in the mine since the first stroke of the ax! Ah, it's a pity; I'm sorry that you are at the head of the discontented."

Maheu listened with his eyes down. Then he began, at first in a low and hesitating voice.

"It is just because I am a quiet man, sir, whom no one has anything against, that my mates have chosen me. That ought to show you that it isn't just a rebellion of blusterers, badly disposed men who want to create disorder. We only want justice; we are tired of starving, and it seems to us that the time has come when things ought to be arranged so that we can at least have bread every day."

His voice grew stronger. He lifted his eyes and went on while looking at the manager.

"You know quite well that we cannot agree to your new system. They accuse us of bad timbering. It's true we don't give the necessary time to the work. But if we gave it, our day's work would be still smaller, and as it doesn't give us enough food at present that would mean the end of everything, the sweep of the clout that would wipe off all your men. Pay us more and we will timber better; we will give the necessary hours to the timbering instead of putting all our strength into the picking, which is the only work that pays. There's no other arrangement possible; if the work is to be done it must be paid for. And what have you invented instead? A thing which we can't get into our heads,

don't you see? You lower the price of the tram and then you pretend to make up for it by paying for all timbering separately. If that was true we should be robbed all the same, for the timbering would still take us more time. But what makes us mad is that it isn't true; the company compensates for nothing at all; it simply puts two centimes a tram into its pocket—that's all."

"Yes, yes, that's it," murmured the other deputies, noticing M. Hennebeau make a violent movement as if to interrupt.

But Maheu cut short the manager's speech. Now that he had set out his words came by themselves. At times he listened to himself with surprise as though a stranger were speaking within him. It was the things amassed within his breast, things he did not even know were there and which came out in an expansion of his heart. He described the wretchedness that was common to all of them, the hard toil, the brutal life, the wife and little ones crying from hunger in the house. He quoted the recent disastrous payments, the absurd fortnightly wages eaten up by fines and rest days and brought back to their families in tears. Was it resolved to destroy them?

"Then, sir," he concluded, "we have come to tell you that if we've got to starve we would rather starve doing nothing. It will be a little less trouble. We have left the pits and we don't go down again unless the company agrees to our terms. The company wants to lower the price of the tram and to pay for the timbering separately. We ask for things to be left as they were, and we also ask for five centimes more the tram. Now it is for you to see if you are on the side of justice and work."

Voices rose among the miners.

"That's it—he has said what we all feel—we only ask what's reason."

Others, without speaking, showed their approval by nodding their heads. The luxurious room had disappeared with its gold and its embroideries, its mysterious piling up of ancient things, and they no longer even felt the carpet which they crushed beneath their heavy boots.

"Let me reply then," at last exclaimed M. Hennebeau, who was growing angry. "First of all, it is not true that the company gains two centimes the tram. Let us look at the figures."

A confused discussion followed. The manager, trying to divide them, appealed to Pierron, who hid himself, stammering. Levaque, on the contrary, was at the head of the more aggressive, muddling up things and affirming facts of which he was ignorant. The loud murmurs of their voices were stifled beneath the hangings in the hothouse atmosphere.

"If you all talk at the same time," said M. Hennebeau, "we shall never come to an understanding."

He had regained his calmness, the rough politeness, without bitterness, of an agent who has received his instructions and means that they shall be respected. From the first word he never took his eye off Etienne and maneuvered to draw the young man out of his obstinate silence. Leaving the discussion about the two centimes, he suddenly enlarged the question.

"No, acknowledge the truth: you are yielding to abominable incitations. It is a plague which is now blowing over the workers everywhere and corrupting

the best. Oh, I have no need for anyone to confess. I can see well that you have been changed, you who used to be so quiet. Is it not so? You have been promised more butter than bread, and you have been told that now your turn has come to be masters. In fact, you have been enrolled in that famous International, that army of brigands who dream of destroying society."

Then Etienne interrupted him.

"You are mistaken, sir. Not a single Montsou collier has yet enrolled. But if they are driven to it all the pits will enroll themselves. That depends on the company."

From that moment the struggle went on between M. Hennebeau and Etienne, as though the other miners were no longer there.

"The company is a providence for the men, and you are wrong to threaten it. This year it has spent three hundred thousand francs in building settlements which only return two per cent, and I say nothing of the pensions which it pays or of the coals and medicines which it gives. You who seem to be intelligent and who will become in a few months one of our most skillful workmen, would it not be better if you were to spread these truths rather than ruin yourself by associating with people of bad reputation? Yes, I mean Rasseneur, whom we had to turn off in order to save our pits from socialistic corruption. You are constantly seen with him, and it is certainly he who has induced you to form this provident fund, which we would willingly tolerate if it were merely a means of saving, but which we feel to be a weapon turned against us, a reserve fund to pay the expenses of the war. And in this connection I ought to add that the company means to control that fund."

Etienne allowed him to continue, fixing his eyes on him, while a slight nervous quiver moved his lips. He smiled at the last remark and simply replied:

"Then that is a new demand, for until now, sir, you have neglected to claim that control. Unfortunately, we wish the company to occupy itself less with us, and instead of playing the part of providence to be merely just with us, giving us our due, the profits which it appropriates. Is it honest whenever a crisis comes to leave the workers to die with hunger in order to save the shareholders' dividends? Whatever you may say, sir, the new system is a disguised reduction of wages, and that is what we are rebelling against, for if the company wants to economize it acts very badly by only economizing on the men."

"Ah, there we are!" cried M. Hennebeau. "I was expecting that—the accusation of starving the people and living by their sweat. How can you talk such folly, you who ought to know the enormous risks which capital runs in industry—in the mines, for example? A well-equipped pit today costs from fifteen hundred thousand francs to two millions, and it is difficult enough to get a moderate interest on the vast sum that is thus swallowed. Nearly half the mining companies in France are bankrupt. Besides, it is stupid to accuse those who succeed of cruelty. When their workers suffer they suffer themselves. Can you believe that the company has not as much to lose as you have in the present crisis? It does not govern wages; it obeys competition under pain of ruin. Look to the facts and not to it. But you don't wish to hear, you don't wish to understand."

"Yes," said the young man, "we understand very well that our lot will never be bettered as long as things go on as they are going, and that is the reason why someday or another the workers will end by arranging that things shall go differently."

This sentence, so moderate in form, was pronounced in a low voice but with such conviction, tremulous in its menace, that a deep silence followed. A certain restraint, a breath of fear, passed through the polite drawing room. The other delegates, though scarcely understanding, felt that their comrade had been demanding their share of this comfort; and they began to cast sidelong looks over the warm hangings, the comfortable seats, all this luxury of which the least knickknack would have bought them soup for a month.

At last M. Hennebeau, who had remained thoughtful, rose as a sign for them to depart. All imitated him. Etienne had lightly pushed Maheu's elbow, and the latter, his tongue once more thick and awkward, again spoke.

"Then, sir, that is all that you reply? We must tell the others that you reject our terms."

"I, my good fellow," exclaimed the manager, "I reject nothing. I am paid just as you are. I have no more power in the matter than the smallest of your trammiers. I receive my orders, and my only duty is to see that they are executed. I have told you what I thought I ought to tell you, but I have nothing to decide. You have brought me your demands. I will make them known to the directors, then I will tell you their reply."

He spoke with the correct air of a high official avoiding any passionate interest in the matter, with the courteous dryness of a simple instrument of authority. And the miners now looked at him with distrust, asking themselves what interest he might have in lying and what he would get by thus putting himself between them and the real masters. A schemer, perhaps, this man who was paid like a worker and who lived so well!

Etienne ventured to intervene again.

"You see, sir, how unfortunate it is that we cannot plead our cause in person. We could explain many things and bring forward many reasons of which you could know nothing, if we only knew where we ought to go."

M. Hennebeau was not at all angry. He even smiled.

"Ah, it gets complicated as soon as you have no confidence in me; you will have to go over there."

The delegates had followed the vague gesture of his hand toward one of the windows. Where was it, over there? Paris, no doubt. But they did not know exactly; it seemed to fall back into a terrible distance, in an inaccessible religious country, where an unknown god sat on his throne, crouching down at the bottom of his tabernacle. They would never see him; they only felt him as a force far off, which weighed on the ten thousand colliers of Montsou. And when the director spoke he had that hidden force behind him delivering oracles.

They were overwhelmed with discouragement; Etienne himself signified by a shrug of the shoulders that it would be best to go, while M. Hennebeau touched Maheu's arm in a friendly way and asked after Jeanlin.

"That is a severe lesson now, and it is you who defend bad timbering. You must reflect, my friends; you must realize that a strike would be a disaster for everybody. Before a week you would die of hunger. What would you do? I count on your good sense, anyhow, and I am convinced that you will go down on Monday, at the latest."

They all left, going out of the drawing room with the tramping of a flock and rounded backs, without replying a word to this hope for submission. The manager, who accompanied them, was obliged to continue the conversation. The company, on the one side, had its new tariff; the workers, on the other, their demand for an increase of five centimes the tram. In order that they might have no illusions, he warned them that their terms would certainly be rejected by the directors.

"Reflect before committing any follies," he repeated, disturbed at their silence.

In the porch Pierron bowed very low, while Levaque pretended to adjust his cap. Maheu was trying to find something to say before leaving, when Etienne again touched his elbow. And they all left in the midst of this threatening silence. The door closed with a loud bang.

When M. Hennebeau re-entered the dining room he found his guests motionless and silent before the liqueurs. In two words he told his story to Deneulin, whose face grew still more gloomy. Then as he drank his cold coffee they tried to speak of other things. But the Grégoires themselves returned to the subject of the strike, expressing their astonishment that no laws existed to prevent workmen from leaving their work. Paul reassured Cécile, stating that they were expecting the police.

At last Mme Hennebeau called the servant:

"Hippolyte, before we go into the drawing room just open the windows and let in a little air."

CHAPTER III

FIFTEEN DAYS HAD PASSED, and on the Monday of the third week the lists sent up to the managers showed a fresh decrease in the number of the miners who had gone down. It was expected that on that morning work would be resumed, but the obstinacy of the directors in not yielding exasperated the miners. The Voreux, Crèveœur, Mirou and Madeleine were not the only pits resting; at the Victoire and at Feutry-Cantel only about a quarter of the men had gone down; even St Thomas was affected. The strike was gradually becoming general.

At the Voreux a heavy silence hung over the pit mouth. It was a dead workshop, the great, empty, abandoned yards where work was sleeping. In the gray December sky, along the high footbridges three or four empty trains bore witness to the mute sadness of things. Underneath, between the slender posts of the platforms, the stock of coal was diminishing, leaving the earth bare and black, while the supplies of wood were moldering beneath the rain. At the quay

on the canal a barge was moored, half laden, lying drowsily in the murky water; and on the deserted pit bank, in which the decomposed sulphates smoked in spite of the rain, a melancholy cart showed its shafts erect. But the buildings especially were growing torpid, the screening shed with closed shutters, the steeple in which the rumbling of the receiving room no more arose, and the machine room grown cold and the giant chimney, too large for the occasional smoke. The winding engine was only heated in the morning. The grooms sent down fodder for the horses, and the captains worked alone at the bottom, having become laborers again, watching over the damages that took place in the passages as soon as they ceased to be repaired; then after nine o'clock the rest of the service was carried on by the ladders. And above these dead buildings, buried in their garment of black dust, there was only heard the escapement of the pumping engine, breathing with its thick, long breath all that was left of the life of the pit, which the water would destroy if that breathing should cease.

On the plain opposite, the settlement of the Deux-Cent-Quarante seemed also to be dead. The prefect of Lille had come in haste, and the police had tramped all the roads, but in face of the calmness of the strikers prefect and police had decided to go home again. Never had the settlement given so splendid an example in the vast plain. The men, to avoid going to the public house, slept all day long; the women, while dividing the coffee, became reasonable, less anxious to gossip and quarrel; and even the troops of children seemed to understand it all and were so good that they ran about with naked feet, smacking each other silently. The word of command had been repeated and circulated from mouth to mouth; they wished to be sensible.

There was, however, a continuous coming and going of people in the Maheus' house. Etienne, as secretary, had divided the three thousand francs of the provident fund among the needy families; afterward from various sides several hundred francs had arrived, yielded by subscriptions and collections. But now all their resources were exhausted; the miners had no more money to keep up the strike, and hunger was there, threatening them. Maigrat, after having promised credit for a fortnight, had suddenly altered his mind at the end of a week and cut off provisions. He usually took his orders from the company; perhaps the latter wished to bring the matter to an end by starving the settlements. He acted, besides, like a capricious tyrant, giving or refusing bread according to the look of the girl who was sent by her parents for provisions; and he especially closed his door spitefully to Maheude, wishing to punish her because he had not been able to get Catherine. To complete their misery it was freezing very hard, and the women watched their piles of coal diminish, thinking anxiously that they could no longer renew them at the pits now that the men were not going down. It was not enough to die of hunger; they must also die of cold.

Among the Maheus everything was already running short. The Levaques could still eat on the strength of a twenty-franc piece lent by Boutelop. As to the Pierrons, they always had money, but in order to appear as needy as the others, for fear of loans, they got their supplies on credit from Maigrat, who

would have thrown his shop at Pierronne if she had held out her petticoat to him. Since Saturday many families had gone to bed without supper, and in face of the terrible days that were beginning not a complaint was heard; all obeyed the word of command with quiet courage. There was an absolute confidence in spite of everything, a religious faith, the blind gift of a population of believers. Since an era of justice had been promised to them they were willing to suffer for the conquest of universal happiness. Hunger exalted their heads; never had the low horizon opened a larger Beyond to these people in the hallucination of their misery. They saw again over there, when their eyes were dimmed by weakness, the ideal city of their dream, but now growing near and seeming to be real, with its population of brothers, its golden age of labor and meals in common. Nothing overcame their conviction that they were at last entering it. The fund was exhausted; the company would not yield; every day must aggravate the situation, and they preserved their hope and showed a smiling contempt for facts. If the earth opened beneath them a miracle would save them. This faith replaced bread and warmed their stomachs. When the Maheus and the others had too quickly digested their soup, made with clear water, they thus rose into a state of semivertigo, that ecstasy of a better life which has flung martyrs to the beasts.

Etienne was henceforth the unquestioned leader. In the evening conversations he gave forth oracles, in the degree to which study had refined him and made him able to enter into difficult matters. He spent the nights reading and received a large number of letters; he even subscribed to the *Vengeur*, a Belgian socialistic paper, and this journal, the first to enter the settlement, gained for him extraordinary consideration among his mates. His growing popularity excited him more every day. To hold an extended correspondence, to discuss the fate of the workers in the four corners of the province, to give advice to the Voreux miners, especially to become a center and to feel the world rolling round him, continually swelled the vanity of the former engineman, the pikeman with greasy black hands. He was climbing a ladder; he was entering this execrated middle class with a satisfaction to his intelligence and comfort which he did not confess to himself. He had only one trouble, the consciousness of his lack of education, which made him embarrassed and timid as soon as he was in the presence of a gentleman in a frock coat. If he went on instructing himself, devouring everything, the lack of method would render assimilation very slow and would produce such confusion that at last he would know much more than he could understand. So at certain hours of good sense he experienced a restlessness with regard to his mission—a fear that he was not the man for the task. Perhaps it required a lawyer, a learned man, able to speak and act without compromising the mates. But an outcry soon restored his assurance. No, no; no lawyer! They are all rascals; they profit by their knowledge to fatten on the people. Let things turn out how they will; the workers must manage their own affairs. And his dream of popular leadership again soothed him: Montsou at his feet, Paris in the misty distance—who knows? The elections someday, the tribune in a gorgeous hall, where he could thunder against the middle class in the first speech pronounced by a workman in a parliament.

During the last few days Etienne had been perplexed. Pluchart wrote letter after letter, offering to come to Montsou to quicken the zeal of the strikers. It was a question of organizing a private meeting over which the mechanic would preside, and beneath this plan lay the idea of exploiting the strike, to gain over to the International these miners who so far had shown themselves suspicious. Etienne feared a disturbance, but he would, however, have allowed Pluchart to come if Rasseneur had not violently blamed this proceeding. In spite of his power, the young man had to reckon with the innkeeper, whose services were of older date and who had faithful followers among his clients. So he still hesitated, not knowing what to reply.

On this very Monday, toward four o'clock, a new letter came from Lille as Etienne was alone with Maheude in the lower room. Maheu, weary of idleness, had gone fishing; if he had the luck to catch a fine fish under the sluice of the canal, they could sell it to buy bread. Old Bonnemort and little Jeanlin had just gone off to try their legs, which were now restored, while the children had departed with Alzire, who spent hours on the pit bank collecting cinders. Seated near the miserable fire, which they no longer dared to keep up, Maheude, with her dress unbuttoned and one breast hanging out to her belly, was suckling Estelle.

When the young man had folded the letter she questioned him:

"Is the news good? Are they going to send us any money?"

He shook his head, and she went on:

"I don't know what we shall do this week. However, we'll hold on all the same. When one has right on one's side, don't you think that gives you heart, and one ends always by being the strongest?"

At the present time she was, to a reasonable extent, in favor of the strike. It would have been better to force the company to be just without leaving off work. But since they had left it they ought not to go back to it without obtaining justice. On this point she was relentless. Better to die than to show oneself in the wrong when one was right!

"Ah!" exclaimed Etienne. "If a fine old cholera was to break out that would free us of all these company exploiters."

"No, no," she replied. "We must not wish anyone dead. That wouldn't help us at all; plenty more would spring up. Now I only ask that they should get sensible ideas, and I expect they will, for there are worthy people everywhere. You know I'm not at all for your politics."

In fact, she always blamed his violent language and thought him aggressive. It was good that they should want their work paid for what it was worth, but why occupy oneself with such things as the bourgeois and government? Why mix oneself up with other people's affairs when one would get nothing out of it but hard knocks? And she kept her esteem for him because he did not get drunk and regularly paid his forty-five francs for board and lodging. When a man behaves well one can forgive him the rest.

Etienne then talked about the republic, which would give bread to everybody. But Maheude shook her head, for she remembered 1848, an awful year, which had left them as bare as worms, her and her man, in their early house-

keeping years. She forgot herself in describing its horrors, her eyes lost in space, her breast open, while her infant Estelle, without letting it go, had fallen asleep on her knees. And Etienne, also absorbed in thought, had his eyes fixed on this enormous breast, of which the soft whiteness contrasted with the muddy, yellowish complexion of her face.

"Not a farthing," she murmured, "nothing to put between one's teeth, and all the pits stopped. Just the same destruction of poor people as today."

But at that moment the door opened, and they remained mute with surprise before Catherine, who then came in. Since her flight with Chaval she had not reappeared at the settlement. Her emotion was so great that, trembling and silent, she forgot to shut the door. She expected to find her mother alone, and the sight of the young man put out of her head the phrases she had prepared on the way.

"What on earth have you come here for?" cried Maheude without even moving from her chair. "I don't want to have anything more to do with you; get along."

Then Catherine tried to find words.

"Mother, it's some coffee and sugar; yes, for the children. I've been thinking of them and done overtime."

She drew out of her pockets a pound of coffee and a pound of sugar and took courage to place them on the table. The strike at the Voreux troubled her while she was working at Jean-Bart, and she had only been able to think of this way of helping her parents a little, under the pretext of caring for the little ones. But her good nature did not disarm her mother, who replied:

"Instead of bringing us sweets you would have done better to stay and earn bread for us."

She overwhelmed her with abuse, relieving herself by throwing in her daughter's face all that she had been saying against her for the past month. To go off with a man, to hang onto him at sixteen, when the family was in want! Only the most degraded of unnatural children could do it. One could forgive a folly, but a mother never forgot a trick like that. There might have been some excuse if they had held her tightly. Not at all; she was as free as air, and they only asked her to come in to sleep.

"Tell me, what have you got in your skin at your age?"

Catherine, standing beside the table, listened with lowered head. A quiver shook her thin girlish body, and she tried to reply in broken words:

"Oh, if it was only me and the amusement that I get! It's him. What he wants I'm obliged to want, too, aren't I? Because, you see, he's the strongest. How can one tell how things are going to turn out? Anyhow, it's done and can't be undone; it may as well be him as another now. He'll have to marry me."

She defended herself without a struggle, with the passive resignation of a girl who has submitted to the male at an early age. Was it not the common lot? She had never dreamed of anything else: violence behind the pit bank, a child at sixteen and then a wretched household if her lover married her. And

she did not blush with shame; she only quivered like this at being treated like a slut before this lad, whose presence oppressed her to despair.

Etienne had risen, however, and was pretending to stir up the nearly extinct fire in order not to interrupt the explanation. But their looks met; he found her pale and exhausted, pretty, indeed, with her clear eyes in the face which had grown tanned, and he experienced a singular feeling; his spite had vanished; he simply desired that she should be happy with this man whom she had preferred to him. He felt the need to occupy himself with her still, a longing to go to Montsou and force the other man to his duty. But she only saw pity in his constant tenderness; he must feel contempt for her to gaze at her like that. Then her heart contracted so that she choked, without being able to stammer any more words of excuse.

"That's it; you'd best hold your tongue," began the implacable Maheude. "If you've come back to stay come in, else get along with you at once and think yourself lucky that I'm not free just now, or I should have put my foot into you somewhere before now."

As if this threat had suddenly been realized, Catherine received a vigorous kick right behind, so violent that she was stupefied with surprise and pain. It was Chaval who had leaped in through the open door to give her this lunge of a vicious beast. For a moment he had watched her from outside.

"Ah, slut," he yelled, "I've followed you. I knew well enough you were coming back here to get him to fill you. And it's you that pay him, eh? You pour coffee down him with my money!"

Maheude and Etienne were stupefied and did not stir. With a furious movement Chaval chased Catherine toward the door.

"Out you go, by God!"

And as she took refuge in a corner he turned on her mother.

"A nice business, to look after the house while your whore of a daughter is kicking up her legs upstairs!"

At last he held Catherine's wrist, shaking her and dragging her out. At the door he again turned toward Maheude, who was nailed to her chair. She had forgotten to fasten up her breast. Estelle had gone to sleep, and her face had slipped down into the woolen petticoat; the enormous breast was hanging free and naked like the udder of a powerful cow.

"When the daughter is not at it, it's the mother who gets herself plugged," cried Chaval. "Go on, show him your meat! He isn't disgusted—your dirty lodger!"

At this Etienne was about to strike his mate. The fear of arousing the settlement by a fight had kept him back from snatching Catherine from Chaval's hands. But rage was now carrying him away, and the two men were face to face with inflamed eyes. It was an old hatred, a jealousy long unacknowledged, which was breaking out. One of them now must do for the other.

"Take care!" stammered Etienne with clenched teeth. "I'll do for you."

"Try!" replied Chaval.

They looked at one another for some seconds longer, so close that their hot breaths burned each other's faces. And it was Catherine who suppliantly took

her lover's hand again to lead him away. She dragged him out of the settlement, fleeing without turning her head.

"What a brute!" muttered Etienne, banging the door and so shaken by anger that he was obliged to sit down.

Maheude, in front of him, had not stirred. She made a vague gesture, and there was silence, a silence which was painful and heavy with unspoken things. In spite of an effort his gaze again returned to her breast, that expanse of white flesh, the brilliance of which now made him uncomfortable. No doubt she was forty and had lost her shape, like a good female who had produced too much; but many would still desire her, strong and solid, with the large long face of a woman who had once been beautiful. Slowly and quietly she was putting back her breast with both hands. A rosy corner was still obstinate, and she pushed it back with her finger and then buttoned herself up and was now quite black and shapeless in her old gown.

"He's a filthy beast," she said at last. "Only a filthy beast could have such nasty ideas. I don't care a hang what he says; it isn't worth notice."

Then in a frank voice she added, fixing her eyes on the young man:

"I have my faults, sure enough, but not that one. Only two men have touched me—a putter, long ago when I was fifteen, and then Maheu. If he had left me like the other—lord, I don't quite know what would have happened—and I don't pride myself either on my good conduct with him since our marriage, because when one hasn't gone wrong it's often because one hasn't the chance. Only I say things as they are, and I know neighbors who couldn't say as much, don't you think?"

"That's true enough," replied Etienne.

And he rose while she decided to light the fire again after having placed the sleeping Estelle on two chairs. If the father caught and sold a fish they could manage to have some soup.

Outside night was already coming on, a frosty night, and with lowered head Etienne walked along, sunk in dark melancholy. It was no longer anger against the man or pity for the poor, ill-treated girl. The brutal scene was effaced and lost, and he was thrown back onto the sufferings of all, the abominations of wretchedness. He thought of the settlement without bread, these women and little ones who would not eat that evening, all this struggling race with empty bellies. And the doubt which sometimes touched him awoke again in the frightful melancholy of the twilight and tortured him with a discomfort which he had never felt so strongly before. With what a terrible responsibility he had burdened himself! Must he still push them on in obstinate resistance now that there was neither money nor credit? And what would be the end of it all if no help arrived and starvation came to beat down their courage? He had a sudden vision of disaster, of dying children and sobbing mothers, while the men, lean and pale, went down once more into the pits. He went on walking, his feet stumbling against the stones, and the thought that the company would be found strongest and that he would have brought misfortune on his comrades filled him with insupportable anguish.

When he raised his head he saw that he was in front of the Voreux. The

gloomy mass of buildings looked somber beneath the growing darkness. The deserted square, obstructed by great motionless shadows, seemed like the corner of an abandoned fortress. As soon as the winding engine stopped the soul left the place. At this hour of the night nothing was alive, not a lantern, not a voice, and the sound of the pump itself was only a distant moan coming, one could not say whence, in this annihilation of the whole pit.

As Étienne gazed the blood flowed back to his heart. If the workers were suffering hunger the company was encroaching on its millions. Why should it prove stronger in this war of work against gold? In any case, the victory would cost it dear. They would have their corpses to count. He felt the fury of battle again, the fierce desire to have done with misery, even at the price of death. It would be as well for the settlement to die at one stroke as to go on dying in detail of famine and injustice. His ill-digested reading came back to him, examples of nations who had burned their towns to arrest the enemy, vague histories of mothers who had saved their children from slavery by crushing their heads against the pavement, of men who had died of want rather than eat the bread of tyrants. His head became exalted; a red gaiety arose out of his crisis of black sadness, chasing away doubt and making him ashamed of this passing cowardice of an hour. And in this revival of his faith gusts of pride reappeared and carried him still higher: the joy of being leader, of seeing himself obeyed, even to sacrifice, the enlarged dream of his power, the evening of triumph. Already he imagined a scene of simple grandeur, his refusal of power, authority placed in the hands of the people when he would be master.

But he awoke and started at the voice of Maheu, who was narrating his luck, a superb trout which he had fished up and sold for three francs.

They would have their soup. Then he left his mate to return alone to the settlement, saying that he would follow him, and he entered and sat down in the *Avantage*, awaiting the departure of a client to tell Rasseneur decisively that he should write to Pluchart to come at once. His resolution was taken; he would organize a private meeting, for victory seemed to him certain if the Montsou colliers adhered in a mass to the International.

CHAPTER IV

It was at the Bon-Joyeux, Widow Désir's, that the private meeting was organized for Thursday at two o'clock. The widow, incensed at the miseries inflicted on her children, the colliers, was in a constant state of anger, especially as her inn was emptying. Never had there been a less thirsty strike; the drunkard's had shut themselves up at home for fear of disobeying the sober word of command. Thus Montsou, which swarmed with people on feast days, now exhibited its wide street in mute and melancholy desolation. No beer flowed from counters or bellies; the gutters were dry. On the pavement at the Casimir bar and the *Estaminet du Progrès* one only saw the pale faces of the landladies, looking inquiringly into the street; then in Montsou itself the deserted doors extended from the *Estaminet l'Enfant* to the *Estaminet Tison*, passing by the

Estaminet Piquette and the Tête-Coupée bar; only the Estaminet Saint-Floi, which was frequented by captains, still drew occasional glasses; the solitude even extended to the Volcan, where the ladies were resting for lack of admirers, although they would have lowered their price from ten sous to five in view of the hard times. A deep mourning was breaking the heart of the entire country.

"By God," exclaimed Widow Désir, slapping her thighs with both hands, "it's the fault of the gendarmes! Let them run me in, devil take them, if they like, but I must plague them."

For her all authorities and masters were gendarmes; it was a term of general contempt in which she enveloped all the enemies of the people. She had greeted Etienne's request with transport; her whole house belonged to the miners; she would lend her ballroom gratuitously and would herself issue the invitations since the law required it. Besides, if the law was not pleased, so much the better! She would give them a bit of her mind. Since yesterday the young man had brought her some fifty letters to sign; he had them copied by neighbors in the settlement who knew how to write, and these letters were sent around among the pits to delegates and to men of whom they were sure. The avowed order of the day was a discussion regarding the continuation of the strike, but in reality they were expecting Pluchart and reckoning on a discourse from him which would cause a general adhesion to the International.

On Thursday morning Etienne was disquieted by the nonappearance of his old foreman, who had promised by letter to arrive on Wednesday evening. What then was happening? He was annoyed that he would not be able to come to an understanding with him before the meeting. At nine o'clock he went to Montsou with the idea that the mechanic had, perhaps, gone there direct without stopping at the Voreux.

"No, I've not seen your friend," replied Widow Désir. "But everything is ready. Come and see."

She led him into the ballroom. The decorations were the same, the garlands which supported at the ceiling a crown of painted paper flowers and the gilt cardboard scutcheons in a line along the wall with the names of saints, male and female. Only the musicians' platform had been replaced by a table and three chairs in one corner, and the room was furnished with forms ranged along the floor.

"It's perfect," Etienne declared.

"And you know," said the widow, "that you're at home here. Yell as much as you like. The gendarmes will have to pass over my body if they do come!"

In spite of his anxiety he could not help smiling when he looked at her, so vast did she appear, with a pair of breasts so huge that one alone would require a man to embrace it, which now led to the saying that of her six weekday lovers she had to take two every evening on account of the work.

But Etienne was astonished to see Rasseneur and Souvarine enter, and as the widow left them, all three, in the large empty hall he exclaimed:

"What! You here already?"

Souvarine, who had worked all night at the Voreux, the enginemen not being on strike, had merely come out of curiosity. As to Rasseneur, he had seemed

constrained during the last two days, and his fat round face had lost its good-natured laugh.

"Pluchart has not arrived, and I am very anxious," added Etienne.

The innkeeper turned away his eyes and replied between his teeth:

"I'm not surprised; I don't expect him."

"What!"

Then he made up his mind and, looking the other man in the face bravely:

"I, too, have sent him a letter, if you want me to tell you; and in that letter I have begged him not to come. Yes, I think we ought to manage our own affairs ourselves, without turning to strangers."

Etienne, losing his self-possession and trembling with anger, turned his eyes on his mate's and stammered:

"You've done that; you've done that?"

"I have done that, certainly! And you know that I trust Pluchart; he's a knowing fellow and reliable; one can get on with him. But, you see, I don't care a damn for your ideas, I don't! Politics, government and all that—I don't care a damn for it! What I want is for the miner to be better treated. I have worked down below for twenty years; I've sweat down there with fatigue and misery and I've sworn to make it easier for the poor beggars who are there still, and I know well enough you'll never get anything with all your ideas; you'll only make the men's fate more miserable still. When they are forced by hunger to go down again they will be more crushed than ever; the company will pay them with strokes of the stick, like a runaway dog who is brought back to his kennel. That's what I want to prevent; do you see?"

He raised his voice, protruding his belly and squarely planted on his big legs. The patient, reasonable man's whole nature was revealed in clear phrases, which flowed abundantly without an effort. Was it not absurd to believe that with one stroke one could change the world, putting the workers in the place of the masters and dividing gold as one divides an apple? It would, perhaps, take thousands and thousands of years for that to be realized. There, hold your tongue, with your miracles! The most sensible plan was, if one did not wish to break one's nose, to go straight forward, to demand possible reforms, in short, to improve the lot of the workers on every occasion. He did his best, so far as he occupied himself with it, to bring the company to better terms; if not, damn it all, they would only starve by being obstinate.

Etienne had let him speak, his own speech cut short by indignation. Then he cried:

"Haven't you got any blood in your veins, by God?"

At one moment he would have struck him, and to resist the temptation he rushed about the hall with long strides, venting his fury on the benches through which he made a passage.

"Shut the door, at all events," Souvarine remarked. "There is no need to be heard."

Having himself gone to shut it, he quietly sat down in one of the office chairs. He had rolled a cigarette and was looking at the other two men with his mild, subtle eye, his lips drawn by a slight smile.

"You won't get any farther by being angry," said Rasseneur judiciously. "I believed at first that you had good sense. It was sensible to recommend calmness to the mates, to force them to keep indoors and to use your power to maintain order. And now you want to get them into a mess!"

At each turn in his walks among the benches Etienne returned toward the innkeeper, seizing him by the shoulders, shaking him and shouting out his replies in his face.

"But, blast it all, I mean to be calm. Yes, I have imposed order on them! Yes, I do advise them still not to stir! Only it doesn't do to be made a joke of after all! You are lucky to remain cool. Now there are hours when I feel that I am losing my head."

This was a confession on his part. He jested over his illusions of a novice, his religious dream of a city in which justice would soon reign among men who had become brothers. A fine method, truly, to cross one's arms and wait if one wished to see men eating each other to the end of the world, like wolves. No! One must interfere or injustice would be eternal, and the rich would forever suck the blood of the poor. Therefore, he could not forgive himself the stupidity of having said formerly that politics ought to be banished from the social question. He knew nothing then; now he had read and studied; his ideas were ripe, and he boasted that he had a system. He explained it badly, however, in confused phrases which contained a little of all the theories he had successively passed through and abandoned. At the summit Karl Marx's idea remained standing: capital was the result of spoliation; it was duty and the privilege of work to reconquer that stolen wealth. In practice he had at first, with Proudhon, been captured by the chimera of a mutual credit, a vast bank of exchange which suppressed middlemen; then Lassalle's co-operative societies, endowed by the state, gradually transforming the earth into a single industrial town, had aroused his enthusiasm until he grew disgusted in face of the difficulty of controlling them, and he had arrived recently at collectivism, demanding that all the instruments of production should be restored to the community. But this remained vague; he knew not how to realize this new dream, still hindered by scruples of reason and good sense, not daring to risk the secretary's absolute affirmations. He simply said that it was a question of getting possession of the government first of all. Afterward they would see.

"But what has taken you? Why are you going over to the bourgeois?" he continued violently, again planting himself before the innkeeper. "You said yourself it would have to burst up!"

Rasseneur blushed slightly.

"Yes, I said so. And if it does burst up you will see that I am not more of a coward than anyone else. Only I refuse to be among those who increase the mess in order to fish out a position for themselves."

Etienne blushed in his turn. The two men no longer shouted, having become bitter and spiteful, conquered by the coldness of their rivalry. It was at bottom that which always strains systems, making one man revolutionary in the extreme, pushing the other to an affectation of prudence, carrying them, in spite of themselves, beyond their true ideas into the fatality of those parts which

men do not choose for themselves. And Souvarine, who was listening, exhibited on his pale, girlish face a silent contempt—the crushing contempt of the man who was willing to yield his life in obscurity without even gaining the splendor of martyrdom.

"Then it's to me that you're saying that?" asked Etienne. "You're jealous!"

"Jealous of what?" replied Rasseneur. "I don't pose as a big man; I'm not trying to create a section at Montsou for the sake of being made secretary."

The other man wanted to interrupt him, but he added:

"Why don't you be frank? You don't care a damn for the International; you're only burning to be at our head, the gentleman who corresponds with the famous Federal Council of the Nord!"

There was silence. Etienne replied, quivering:

"Good! I don't think I have anything to reproach myself with. I always asked your advice, for I knew that you had fought here long before me. But since you can't endure anyone by your side, I'll act alone in future. And first I warn you that the meeting will take place even if Pluchart does not come, and the mates will join in spite of you."

"Oh, join!" muttered the innkeeper. "That's not enough. You'll have to get them to pay their subscriptions."

"Not at all. The International grants time to workers on strike. It will at once come to our help, and we shall pay later on."

Rasseneur was carried beyond himself.

"Well, we shall see. I belong to this meeting of yours, and I shall speak. I shall not let you turn our friends' heads. I shall let them know where their real interests lie. We shall see whom they mean to follow—me, whom they have known for thirty years, or you, who have turned everything upside down among us in less than a year. No, no, damn it all! We shall see which of us is going to crush the other."

And he went out, banging the door. The garlands of flowers swayed from the ceiling, and the gilt shields jumped against the walls. Then the great room fell back into its heavy calm.

Souvarine was smoking in his quiet way, seated before the table. After having walked for a moment in silence Etienne began to relieve his feelings at length. Was it his fault if they had left that fat, lazy fellow to come to him? And he defended himself from having sought popularity. He knew not even how it had happened, this friendliness of the settlement, the confidence of the miners, the power which he now had over them. He was indignant at being accused of wishing to bring everything to confusion out of ambition; he struck his chest, protesting his brotherly feelings.

Suddenly he stopped before Souvarine and exclaimed:

"Do you know, if I thought I should cost a drop of blood to a friend I would go off at once to America!"

The engineman shrugged his shoulders, and a smile again came on his lips.

"Oh, blood!" he murmured. "What does that matter? The earth has need of it."

Etienne, growing calm, took a chair and put his elbows on the other side of

the table. This fair face with the dreamy eyes, which sometimes grew savage with its red light, disturbed him and exercised a singular power over his will. In spite of his comrade's silence, conquered even by that silence, he felt himself gradually absorbed.

"Well," he asked, "what would you do in my place? Am I not right to act as I do? Isn't it best for us to join this association?"

Souvarine, after having slowly ejected a jet of smoke, replied by his favorite word:

"Oh, foolery! But meanwhile it's always so. Besides, their International will soon begin to move. He has taken it up."

"Who then?"

"He!"

He had pronounced this word in a whisper, with religious fervor, casting a glance toward the east. He was speaking of the master, Bakunin the destroyer.

"He alone can give the thunderclap," he went on, "while your learned men, with their evolution, are mere cowards. Before three years are past the International, beneath his orders, will crush the old world."

Etienne pricked up his ears in attention. He was burning to gain knowledge, to understand this worship of destruction, regarding which the engineman only uttered occasional obscure words, as though he kept certain mysteries to himself.

"Well, but explain to me. What is your aim?"

"To destroy everything. No more nations, no more governments, no more property, neither God nor worship."

"I quite understand. Only what will that lead you to?"

"To the primitive, formless commune, to a new world, to the renewal of everything."

"And the means of execution? How do you reckon to set about it?"

"By fire, by poison, by the dagger. The brigand is the true hero, the popular avenger, the revolutionary in action, with no phrase drawn out of books. We need a series of tremendous outrages to frighten the powerful and to arouse the people."

As he talked, Souvarine grew terrible. An ecstasy raised him on his chair; a mystic flame darted from his pale eyes, and his delicate hands gripped the edge of the table almost to breaking. The other man looked at him in fear and thought of the stories of which he had received vague intimation, of the mines charged beneath the czar's palace, of chiefs of police struck down by knives like wild boars, of his mistress, the only woman he had loved, hanged at Moscow one rainy morning, while in the crowd he kissed her with his eyes for the last time.

"No! No!" murmured Etienne, as with a gesture he pushed away these abominable visions. "We haven't got to that yet over here. Murder and fire, never! It is monstrous, unjust, all the mates would rise and strangle the guilty one!"

And, besides, he could not understand; the instincts of his race refused to accept this somber dream of the extermination of the world, mown level like a

rye field. Then what ~~would~~ they do afterward? How would the nations spring up again? He wanted a reply.

"Tell me your program. We should like to know where we are going to."

Then Souvarine concluded peacefully, with his gaze fixed on space:

"All reasoning about the future is criminal, because it prevents pure destruction and interferes with the progress of revolution."

This made Etienne laugh, in spite of the cold shiver which passed over his flesh. Besides, he willingly acknowledged that there was something in these ideas which attracted him by their fearful simplicity. Only it would be playing into Rasseneur's hands if he were to repeat such things to his comrades. It was necessary to be practical.

Widow Désir proposed that they should have lunch. They agreed and went into the inn parlor, which was separated from the ballroom on weekdays by a movable partition. When they had finished their omelet and cheese the engineer proposed to depart, and as the other tried to detain him:

"What for? To listen to you talking useless foolery? I've seen enough of it. Good day."

He went off in his gentle, obstinate way with a cigarette between his lips.

Etienne's anxiety increased. It was one o'clock, and Pluchart was decidedly breaking his promise. Toward half-past one the delegates began to appear, and he had to receive them for he wished to see who entered, for fear that the company might send its usual spies. He examined every letter of invitation and took note of those who entered; many came in without a letter, and they were admitted, provided he knew them. As two o'clock struck Rasseneur entered, finishing his pipe before the counter and chatting without haste. This provoking calmness still further disturbed Etienne, all the more as many had come merely for fun—Zacharie, Mouquet and others. These cared little about the strike and found it a great joke to do nothing. Seated at tables and spending their last two sous on drink, they grinned and bantered their mates, the serious ones, who had come to make fools of themselves.

Another quarter of an hour passed; there was impatience in the hall. Then Etienne, in despair, made a gesture of resolution. And he had decided to enter when Widow Désir, who was putting her head outside, exclaimed:

"But here he is—your gentleman!"

It was, in fact, Pluchart. He came in a cab drawn by a broken-winded horse. He jumped at once onto the pavement, a thin, insipidly handsome man with a large square head; in his black cloth frock coat he had the Sunday air of a well-to-do workman. For five years he had not done a stroke with the file, and he took care of his appearance, especially combing his hair in a correct manner, vain of his successes on the platform, but his limbs were still stiff, and the nails of his large hands, eaten by the iron, had not grown again. Very active, he worked out his ambitions, scouring the province unceasingly in order to place his ideas.

"Ah, don't be angry with me," he said, anticipating questions and reproaches. "Yesterday lecture at Preuilly in the morning, meeting in the evening at Valençay. Today lunch at Marchiennes with Sauvagnat. Then I had to take a

cab. I'm worn out; you can tell by my voice. But that's nothing; I shall speak all the same."

He was on the threshold of the Bon-Joyeux when he bethought himself.

"By jingo! I'm forgetting the tickets. We should be in a fine fix!"

He went back to the cab, which the cabman drew up again, and he pulled out a little black wooden box, which he carried off under his arm.

Etienne walked radiantly in his shadow, while Rasseneur, in consternation, did not dare to offer his hand. But the other was already pressing it and saying a rapid word or two about the letter. What a rum idea! Why not hold this meeting? One should always hold a meeting when possible. Widow Désir asked if he would take anything, but he refused. No need; he spoke without drinking. Only he was in a hurry, because in the evening he reckoned on pushing as far as Joiselle, where he wished to come to an understanding with Legoujeux. Then they all entered the ballroom together. Maheu and Levaque, who had arrived late, followed them. The door was then locked in order to be at home. This made the jokers laugh, Zacharie shouting to Mouquet that perhaps they were going to get them all with child in here.

About a hundred miners were waiting on the benches in the close air of the room, with the warm odors of the last ball rising from the floor. Whispers ran round, and all heads turned while the newcomers sat down in the empty places. They gazed at the Lille gentleman, and the black frock coat caused a certain surprise and discomfort.

But on Etienne's proposition the meeting was at once constituted. He gave out the names while the others approved by lifting their hands. Pluchart was nominated chairman, and Maheu and Etienne himself were voted stewards. There was a movement of chairs, and the officers were installed; for a moment they watched the chairman disappear beneath the table, under which he slid the box, which he had not let go. When he reappeared he struck lightly with his fist to call attention; then he began in a hoarse voice:

"Citizens!"

A little door opened and he had to stop. It was Widow Désir who, coming round by the kitchen, brought in six glasses on a tray.

"Don't put yourself out," she said. "When one talks one gets thirsty."

Maheu relieved her of the tray, and Pluchart was able to go on. He said how very touched he was at his reception by the Montsou workers; he excused himself for his delay, mentioning his fatigue and his sore throat, then he gave place to Citizen Rasseneur, who wished to speak.

Rasseneur had already planted himself beside the table near the glasses. The back of a chair served him as a rostrum. He seemed very moved and coughed before starting in a loud voice:

"Mates!"

What gave him his influence over the workers at the pit was the facility of his speech, the good-natured way with which he could go on talking to them by the hour without ever growing weary. He never ventured to gesticulate but stood stolid and smiling, drowning them and dazing them until they all shouted: "Yes, yes, that's true enough; you're right!" However, on this day, from the

first word, he felt that there was a sullen opposition. This made him advance prudently. He only discussed the continuation of the strike and waited for applause before attacking the International. Certainly honor prevented them from yielding to the company's demands, but how much misery! What a terrible future if it was necessary to persist much longer! And without deciding for submission he damped their courage; he showed them the settlements dying of hunger; he asked on what resources the partisans of resistance were counting. Three or four friends tried to applaud him, but this accentuated the cold silence of the majority and the rather irritated disapprobation which greeted his phrases. Then despairing of winning them over, he was carried away by anger; he foretold misfortune if they allowed their heads to be turned at the instigation of strangers. Two thirds of the audience had risen indignantly, trying to silence him, since he insulted them by treating them like children unable to act themselves. But he went on speaking in spite of the tumult, taking repeated gulps of beer and shouting violently that the man was not born who would prevent him from doing his duty.

Pluchart had risen. As he had no bell he struck his fist on the table, repeating in his hoarse voice:

"Citizens, citizens!"

At last he obtained a little quiet, and the meeting, when consulted, brought Rasseneur's speech to an end. The delegates who had represented the pits in the interview with the manager led the others, all enraged by starvation and agitated by new ideas. The voting was decided in advance.

"You don't care a damn, you don't! You can eat!" yelled Levaque, thrusting out his fist at Rasseneur.

Etienne leaned over behind the chairman's back to appease Maheu, who was very red and carried out of himself by this hypocritical discourse.

"Citizens!" said Pluchart. "Allow me to speak!"

There was deep silence. He spoke. His voice sounded painful and hoarse, but he was used to it on his journeys and took his laryngitis about him with his program. Gradually his voice expanded and he produced pathetic effects with it. With open arms and accompanying his periods with a swaying of his shoulders, he had an eloquence which recalled the pulpit, a religious method of sinking the ends of his sentences with a monotonous roll which at last carried conviction.

His discourse centered on the greatness and the advantages of the International; it was that with which he always started in every new locality. He explained its aim, the emancipation of the workers; he showed its imposing structure—below the commune, higher the province, still higher the nation and at the summit humanity. His arms moved slowly at each stage, preparing the immense cathedral of the future world. Then there was the interior administration: he read the statutes, spoke of the congresses, pointed out the growing importance of the work, the enlargement of the program, which, starting from the discussion of wages, was now working toward a social liquidation, to have done with the wage system. No more nationalities. The workers of the whole world would be reunited by a common need for justice, sweeping away the

middle-class corruption, founding, at last, a free society in which he who did not work should not reap! He roared; his breath startled the flowers of painted paper beneath the low, smoky ceiling which sent back the sound of his voice.

A wave passed through the audience. Some of them cried:

"That's it! We're with you."

He went on. The world will be conquered before three years. And he enumerated the nations already conquered. From all sides adhesions are raining in. Never had a young religion counted so many disciples. Then when they had the upper hand they would dictate terms to the masters, who, in their turn, would have a fist at their throats.

"Yes, yes! They'll have to go down!"

With a gesture he enforced silence. Now he was entering on the strike question. In principle he disapproved of strikes; it was a slow method which aggravated the sufferings of the worker. But before better things arrived, and when they were inevitable, one must make up one's mind to them, for they had the advantage of disorganizing capital. And in this case he showed the International as a providence for strikers and quoted examples: in Paris during the strike of the bronzeworkers the masters had granted everything at once, terrified at the news that the International was sending help; in London it had saved the miners at a colliery by sending back, at its own expense, a shipload of Belgians who had been brought over by the coalowner. It was sufficient to join, and the companies trembled, for the men entered the great army of workers who were resolved to die for one another rather than to remain the slaves of a capitalistic society.

Applause interrupted him. He wiped his forehead with his handkerchief, at the same time refusing a glass which Maheu passed to him. When he was about to continue fresh applause cut short his speech.

"It's all right," he said rapidly to Etienne. "They've had enough. Quick, the cards!"

He had plunged beneath the table and reappeared with the little black wooden box.

"Citizens!" he shouted, dominating the disturbance. "Here are the cards of membership. Let your delegates come up, and I will give them to them to be distributed. Later on we can arrange everything."

Rasseneur rushed forward and again protested. Etienne was also agitated, having to make a speech. Extreme confusion followed. Levaque jumped up with his fists out, as if to fight. Maheu was up and speaking, but nobody could distinguish a single word. In the growing tumult the dust rose from the floor, a floating dust of former balls, poisoning the air with a strong odor of putters and trammers.

Suddenly the little door opened, and Widow Désir filled it with her belly and breast, shouting in a thundering voice:

"For God's sake! Silence! The gendarmes!"

It was the commissioner of the district, who had arrived rather late to prepare a report and to break up the meeting. Four gendarmes accompanied him. For five minutes the widow had delayed them at the door, replying that she

was at home and that she had a perfect right to entertain her friends. But they had hustled her away, and she had rushed in to warn her children.

"Must clear out through here," she said again. "There's a dirty gendarme guarding the court. It doesn't matter; my little woodhouse opens into the alley. Quick, then!"

The commissioner was already knocking with his fist, and as the door was not opened, he threatened to force it. A spy must have spoken, for he cried that the meeting was illegal, a large number of miners being there without any letter of invitation.

In the hall the trouble was growing. They could not escape thus; they had not even voted either for adhesion or for the continuation of the strike. All persisted in talking at the same time. At last the chairman suggested a vote by acclamation. Arms were raised, and the delegates declared hastily that they would join in the name of their absent mates. And it was thus that the ten thousand colliers of Montsou became members of the International. However, the retreat began. In order to cover it Widow Désir had propped herself up against the door, which the butt ends of the gendarmes' muskets were forcing at her back. The miners jumped over the benches and escaped, one by one, through the kitchen and the woodyard. Rasseneur disappeared among the first, and Levaque followed him, forgetful of his abuse and planning how he could get an offer of a glass to pull himself together. Etienne, after having seized the little box, waited with Pluchart and Maheu, who considered it a point of honor to emerge last. As they disappeared the lock gave, and the commissioner found himself in the presence of the widow, whose breast and belly still formed a barricade.

"It doesn't help you much to smash everything in my house," she said. "You can see there's nobody here."

The commissioner, a slow man who did not care for scenes, simply threatened to take her off to prison. And he then went away with his four gendarmes to prepare a report, beneath the jeers of Zacharie and Mouquet, who were full of admiration for the way in which their mates had humbugged this armed force for which they themselves did not care a hang.

In the alley outside Etienne, embarrassed by the box, was rushing along, followed by the others. He suddenly thought of Pierron and asked why he had not turned up. Maheu, also running, replied that he was ill—a convenient illness, the fear of compromising himself. They wished to retain Pluchart, but without stopping he declared that he must set out at once for Joiselle, where Legoujeux was awaiting his orders. Then as they ran they shouted out to him their wishes for a pleasant journey and rushed through Montsou with their heels in the air. A few words were exchanged, broken by the panting of their chests. Etienne and Maheu were laughing confidently, henceforth certain of victory. When the International had sent help it would be the company that would beg them to resume work. And in this burst of hope, in this gallop of big boots sounding over the pavement of the streets, there was something else also, something somber and fierce, a gust of violence which would inflame the settlements in the four corners of the country.

CHAPTER V

ANOTHER FORTNIGHT had passed by. It was the beginning of January and cold mists benumbed the immense plain. The misery had grown still greater, and the settlements were in agony from hour to hour beneath the increasing famine. Four thousand francs sent by the International from London had scarcely supplied bread for three days, and then nothing had come. This great dead hope was beating down their courage. On what were they to count now since even their brothers had abandoned them? They felt themselves separated from the world and lost in the midst of this deep winter.

On Tuesday no resources were left in the Deux-Cent-Quarante settlement. Etienne and the delegates had multiplied their energies. New subscriptions were opened in the neighboring towns, even in Paris; collections were made and lectures organized. These efforts came to nothing. Public opinion, which had at first been moved, grew indifferent now that the strike dragged on forever and so quietly, without any dramatic incidents. Small charities scarcely sufficed to maintain the poorer families. The others lived by pawning their clothes and selling up the household piece by piece. Everything went to the brokers, the wool of the mattresses, the kitchen utensils, even the furniture. For a moment they thought themselves saved, for the small retail shopkeepers of Montsou, killed out by Maigrat, had offered credit to try and get back their custom; and for a week Verdonck, the grocer, and the two bakers, Carouble and Smelten, kept open shop, but when their advances were exhausted all three stopped. The bailiffs were rejoicing; there only resulted a piling up of debts which would for a long time weigh upon the miners. There was no more credit to be had anywhere and not an old saucepan to sell; they might lie down in a corner to die like mangy dogs.

Etienne would have sold his flesh. He had given up his salary and had gone to Marchiennes to pawn his trousers and cloth coat, happy to set the Maheus' pot boiling once more. His boots alone remained, and he retained these to keep a firm foothold, he said. His grief was that the strike had come on too early, before the provident fund had had time to swell. He regarded this as the only cause of the disaster, for the workers would surely triumph over the masters on the day when they had saved enough money to resist. And he recalled Souvarine's words accusing the company of pushing forward the strike to destroy the fund at the beginning.

The sight of the settlement and of these poor people without bread or fire overcame him. He preferred to go out and to weary himself with distant walks. One evening as he was coming back and passing near Réquillart he perceived an old woman who had fainted by the roadside. No doubt she was dying of hunger; and, having raised her, he began to shout to a girl whom he saw on the other side of the paling.

"Why! Is it you?" he said, recognizing Mouquette. "Come and help me then; we must give her something to drink."

Mouquette, moved to tears, quickly went into the shaky hovel which her father had set up in the midst of the ruins. She came back at once with gin and a loaf. The gin revived the old woman, who without speaking bit greedily into the bread. She was the mother of a miner who lived at the settlement on the Cougny side, and she had fallen there on returning from Joiselle, where she had in vain attempted to borrow half a franc from a sister. When she had eaten she went away, dazed.

Etienne stood in the open field of Réquillart, where the crumbling sheds were disappearing beneath the brambles.

"Well, won't you come in and drink a little glass?" asked Mouquette merrily. And as he hesitated:

"Then you're still afraid of me?"

He followed her, won by her laughter. This bread, which she had given so willingly, moved him. She would not take him into her father's room but led him into her own room, where she at once poured out two little glasses of gin. The room was very neat, and he complimented her on it. Besides, the family seemed to want for nothing; the father continued his duties as a groom at the Voreux while she, saying that she could not live with folded arms, had become a laundress, which brought her in thirty sous a day. One may amuse oneself with men, but one isn't lazy for all that.

"I say," she murmured, all at once coming and putting her arms round him prettily, "why don't you like me?"

He could not help laughing; she had done this in so charming a way.

"But I like you very much," he replied.

"No, no, not like I mean. You know that I am dying of longing. Do you know that would give me so much pleasure?"

It was true; she had desired him for six months. He still looked at her as she clung to him, pressing him with her two tremulous arms, her face raised with such supplicating love that he was deeply moved. There was nothing beautiful in her large round face with its yellow complexion eaten by the coal, but her eyes shone with flame; a charm rose from her skin, a trembling of desire which made her rosy and young. In the face of this gift which was so humble and so ardent he no longer dared to refuse.

"Oh, you are willing," she stammered, delighted. "Oh! you are willing!"

And she gave herself up with the fainting awkwardness of a virgin, as if it were for the first time and she had never before known a man. Then when he left her it was she who was overcome with gratitude; she said, "Thank you" to him and kissed his hands.

Etienne remained rather ashamed of this good fortune. Nobody boasted of having had Mouquette. As he went away he swore that it should not occur again, but he preserved a friendly remembrance of her; she was a capital girl.

When he got back to the settlement he found serious news which made him forget the adventure. The rumor circulated that the company would, perhaps, agree to make a concession if the delegates made a fresh attempt with the manager. At all events some captains had spread this rumor. The truth was that in this struggle the mine was suffering even more than the miners. On both

sides obstinacy was piling up ruin; while work was dying of hunger, capital was being destroyed. Every day of rest carried away hundreds of thousands of francs. Every machine which stops is a dead machine. Tools and material are impaired; the money that is sunk melts away like water drunk by the sand. Since the small stock of coal at the surface of the pits was exhausted customers talked of going to Belgium, so that in future they would be threatened from that quarter. But what especially frightened the company, although the matter was carefully concealed, was the increasing damage to the galleries and workings. The captains could not cope with the repairs; the timber was falling everywhere, and landslips were constantly taking place. Soon the disasters became so serious that long months would be needed for repairs before hewing could be resumed. Already stories went about the country: at Crèvecœur three hundred meters of road had subsided in a mass, stopping up access to the Cinq-Paumes; at Madeleine the Maugrétout seam was crumbling away and filling with water. The management refused to admit this, but suddenly two accidents, one after the other, had forced them to avow it. One morning, near Piolaine, the ground was found cracked above the north gallery of Mirou which had fallen in the day before, and on the following day the ground subsided within the Voreux, shaking the corner of a suburb to such an extent that two houses nearly disappeared.

Etienne and the delegates hesitated to risk any steps without knowing the directors' intentions. Dansaert, whom they questioned, avoided replying: certainly the misunderstanding was deplored, and everything would be done to bring about an agreement, but he could say nothing definitely. At last they decided that they would go to M. Hennebeau in order to have reason on their side, for they did not wish to be accused later on of having refused the company an opportunity of acknowledging that it had been in the wrong. Only they vowed to yield nothing and to maintain, in spite of everything, the terms which were alone just.

The interview took place on Thursday morning, when the settlement was sinking to desperate wretchedness. It was less cordial than the first interview. Maheu was still the speaker, and he explained that their mates had sent them to ask if these gentlemen had anything new to say. At first M. Hennebeau affected surprise: no order had reached him; nothing could be changed so long as the miners persisted in their detestable rebellion, but this official stiffness produced the worst effects, so that if the delegates had gone out of their way to offer conciliation, the way in which they were received only served to make them more obstinate. Afterward the manager tried to seek a basis of mutual concession; thus if the men would accept the separate payment for timbering the company would raise that payment by the two centimes which they were accused of profiting by. Besides, he added that he would take the offer on himself, that nothing was settled but that he flattered himself he could obtain this concession from Paris. But the delegates refused and repeated their demands: the retention of the old system, with a rise of five centimes a tram. Then he acknowledged that he could treat with them at once and urged them to accept in the name of their wives and little ones dying of hunger. And with

eyes on the ground and stiff heads they said "No" always "No," with fierce vigor. They separated curtly. M. Hennebeau banged the doors. Etienne, Maheu and the others went off stamping with their great heels on the pavement in the mute rage of the vanquished pushed to extremes. Toward two o'clock the women of the settlement, on their side, made an application to Maigrat. There was only this hope left, to bend this man and to wrench from him another week's credit. The idea originated with Maheude, who often counted too much on people's good nature. She persuaded the Brûlé and the Levaque to accompany her; as to Pierronne, she excused herself, saying that she could not leave Pierron, whose illness still continued. Other women joined the band till they numbered quite twenty. When the inhabitants of Montsou saw them arrive, gloomy and wretched, occupying the whole width of the road, they shook their heads anxiously. The doors were closed, and one lady hid her plate. It was the first time they had been seen thus, and there could not be a worse sign: usually everything was going to ruin when the women thus scoured the streets. At Maigrat's there was a violent scene. At first he had made them go in, jeering and pretending to believe that they had come to pay their debts: that was nice of them to have agreed to come and bring the money all at once. Then as soon as Maheude began to speak he pretended to be enraged. Were they making fun of people? More credit! Then they wanted to turn him into the streets? No, not a single potato, not a single crumb of bread! And he sent them off to the grocer Verdonck and to the bakers Carouble and Smelten, since they now dealt with them. The women listened with timid humility, apologizing and watching his eyes to see if he would relent. He began to joke, offering his shop to the Brûlé if she would have him as a lover. They were all so cowardly that they laughed at this, and the Levaque improved on it, declaring that she was willing, she was. But he at once became abusive and pushed them toward the door. As they insisted suppliantly, he treated one brutally. The others on the pavement shouted that he had sold himself to the company, while Maheude, with her arms in the air, in a burst of avenging indignation, cried out on death, exclaiming that such a man did not deserve to eat.

The return to the settlement was melancholy. When the women came back with empty hands the men looked at them and then lowered their heads. There was nothing more to be done; the day would end without a spoonful of soup, and the other days extended in an icy shadow, without a ray of hope. They had made up their minds to it, and no one spoke of surrender. This excess of misery made them still more obstinate, mute as tracked beasts, resolute to die at the bottom of their hole rather than come out. Who would dare to speak first of submission? They had sworn with their mates to hold together, and hold together they would, as they held together at the pit when one of them was beneath a landslip. It was as it ought to be; it was a good school for resignation down there. They might well tighten their belts for a week, when they had been swallowing fire and water ever since they were twelve years of age; and their devotion was thus augmented by the pride of soldiers, of men proud of their profession, who in their daily struggle with death had gained a pride in sacrifice.

With the Maheus it was a terrible evening. They were all silent, seated before the dying fire in which the last cinders were smoking. After having emptied the mattresses, handful by handful, they had decided the day before to sell the clock for three francs; and the room seemed bare and dead now that the familiar tick-tack no longer filled it with sound. The only object of luxury now, in the middle of the sideboard, was the rose cardboard box, an old present from Maheu, which Maheude treasured like a jewel. The two good chairs had gone; Father Bonnemort and the children were squeezed together on an old mossy bench brought in from the garden. And the livid twilight now coming on seemed to increase the cold.

"What's to be done?" repeated Maheude, crouching down in the corner by the oven.

Etienne stood up, looking at the portraits of the emperor and empress stuck against the wall. He would have torn them down long since if the family had not preserved them for ornament. So he murmured with clenched teeth:

"And to think that we can't get two sous out of these damned idiots who are watching us starve!"

"If I were to take the box?" said the woman, very pale, after some hesitation.

Maheu, seated on the edge of the table, with hanging legs and his head on his chest, sat up.

"No! I won't have it!"

Maheude painfully rose and walked round the room. Good God! Was it possible that they were reduced to such misery? The cupboard without a crumb, nothing more to sell, no notion where to get a loaf! And the fire which was nearly out! She became angry with Alzire, whom she had sent in the morning to glean on the pit bank and who had come back with empty hands, saying that the company would not allow gleaning. Did it matter a hang what the company wanted? As if they were robbing anyone by picking up the bits of lost coal! The little girl, in despair, told how a man had threatened to hit her; then she promised to go back next day, even if she were beaten.

"And that imp Jeanlin," cried the mother; "where is he now, I should like to know? He ought to have brought the salad; we can browse on that like beasts, at all events! You will see; he won't come back. Yesterday, too, he slept out. I don't know what he's up to; the rascal always looks as though his belly were full."

"Perhaps," said Etienne, "he picks up sous on the road."

She suddenly lifted both fists furiously.

"If I knew that! My children beg! I'd rather kill them and myself too."

Maheu had again sunk down at the edge of the table. Lénore and Henri, astonished that they had nothing to eat, began to moan, while old Bonnemort, in silence, philosophically rolled his tongue in his mouth to deceive his hunger. No one spoke any more; all were becoming benumbed beneath this aggravation of their evils: the grandfather, coughing and spitting out the black phlegm, taken again by rheumatism which was turning to dropsy; the father, asthmatic and with knees swollen with water; the mother and the little ones scarred by

scrofula and hereditary anemia. No doubt their work made this inevitable; they only complained when the lack of food killed them off, and already they were falling like flies in the settlement. But something must be found for supper. My God, where was it to be found; what was to be done?

Then in the twilight, which made the room more and more gloomy with its dark melancholy, Etienne, who had been hesitating for a moment, at last decided with aching heart.

"Wait for me," he said. "I'll go and see somewhere."

And he went out. The idea of Mouquette had occurred to him. She would certainly have a loaf and would give it willingly. It annoyed him to be thus forced to return to Réquillart; this girl would kiss his hands with her air of an affectionate servant, but one did not leave one's friends in trouble; he would still be kind with her if need be.

"I will go and look round too," said Maheude, in her turn. "It's too stupid."

She reopened the door after the young man and closed it violently, leaving the others motionless and mute in the faint light of a candle end which Alzire had just lit. Outside she stopped and thought for a moment. Then she entered the Levaques' house.

"Tell me: I lent you a loaf the other day. Could you give it me back?"

But she stopped herself. What she saw was far from encouraging; the house spoke of misery even more than her own.

The Levaque woman, with fixed eyes, was gazing into her burned-out fire, while Levaque, made drunk on his empty stomach by some nail makers, was sleeping on the table. With his back to the wall, Bouteloup was mechanically rubbing his shoulders, with the amazement of a good-natured fellow who has eaten up his savings and is astonished at having to tighten his belt.

"A loaf! Ah, my dear," replied the Levaque woman, "I wanted to borrow another from you!"

Then as her husband groaned with pain in his sleep, she pushed his face against the table.

"Hold your row, bloody beast! So much the better if it burns your guts! Instead of being paid to drink, you ought to have asked twenty sous from a friend."

She went on relieving herself by swearing in the midst of this dirty household, already abandoned so long that an unbearable smell was exhaling from the floor. Everything might smash up; she didn't care a hang! Her son, that rascal Bébert, had also disappeared since morning, and she shouted that it would be a good riddance if he never came back. Then she said that she would go to bed. At least she could get warm. She hustled Bouteloup.

"Come along, up we go. The fire's out. No need to light the candle to see the empty plates. Well, are you coming, Louis? I tell you that we must go to bed. We can stick together there; that's a comfort. And let this damned drunkard die here of cold by himself!"

When she found herself outside again Maheude struck resolutely across the gardens to go to Pierron's house. She heard laughter. As she knocked there was sudden silence. It was a full minute before the door was opened.

"What, is it you?" exclaimed Pierronne with affected surprise. "I thought it was the doctor."

Without allowing her to speak she went on, pointing to Pierron, who was seated before a large coal fire:

"Ah, he makes no progress; he makes no progress at all. His face looks all right; it's in his belly that it takes him. Then he must have heat. We burn all that we've got."

Pierron, in fact, looked very well; his complexion was good and his flesh fat. It was in vain that he breathed hard in order to play the sick man. Besides, as Maheude came in she perceived a strong smell of rabbit; they had certainly put the dish out of the way. There were crumbs strewed over the table, and in the very midst she saw a forgotten bottle of wine.

"Mother has gone to Montsou to try and get a loaf," said Pierronne again. "We are chilled with waiting for her."

But her voice choked; she had followed her neighbor's glance, and her eyes also fell on the bottle. Immediately she began again and narrated the story. Yes, it was wine; the Piolaine people had brought her that bottle for her man, who had been ordered by the doctor to take claret. And her thankfulness poured forth in a stream. What good people they were! The young lady especially; she was not proud, going into workpeople's houses and distributing her charities herself.

"I see," said Maheude. "I know them."

Her heart ached at the idea that the good things always go to the least poor. It was always so, and these Piolaine people would have carried water to the river. Why had she not seen them in the settlement? Perhaps, all the same, she might have got something out of them.

"I had come," she confessed at last, "to know if there was more going with you than with us. Have you just a little vermicelli by way of loan?"

Pierronne expressed her grief noisily.

"Nothing at all, my dear. Not what you can call a grain of semolina. If mother hasn't come back it's because she hasn't succeeded. We must go to bed supperless."

At this moment crying was heard from the cellar, and she grew angry and struck her fist against the door. It was that gadabout Lydie, whom she had shut up, she said, to punish her for not having returned until five o'clock after having been roaming about the whole day. One could not subdue her; she was constantly disappearing.

Maheude, however, remained standing; she could not make up her mind to leave. This large fire filled her with a painful sensation of comfort; the thought that they were eating there enlarged the void in her stomach. Evidently they had sent away the old woman and shut up the child to blow themselves out with their rabbit. Ah, whatever people may say, when a woman behaves ill that brings luck to her house.

"Good night," she said suddenly.

Outside night had come on, and the moon behind the clouds was lighting up the earth with a dubious glow. Instead of traversing the gardens Maheude

went around, despairing, afraid to go home again. But along the dead frontages all the doors smelled of famine and sounded hollow. What was the good of knocking? There was wretchedness everywhere. For weeks they had had nothing to eat. Even the odor of onion had gone, that strong odor which revealed the settlement from afar across the country; now there was nothing but the smell of old vaults, the dampness of holes in which nothing lives. Vague sounds were dying out, stifled tears, lost oaths; and in the silence which slowly grew heavier one could hear the sleep of hunger coming on, the throwing of bodies across beds in the nightmares of empty bellies.

As she passed before the church she saw a shadow slip rapidly by. A gleam of hope made her hasten, for she had recognized the Montsou priest, Abbé Joire, who said mass on Sundays at the settlement chapel. No doubt he had just come out of the sacristy, where he had been called to settle some affair. With rounded back he moved quickly on, a fat gentleman, anxious to live at peace with everybody. If he had come at night it must have been in order not to compromise himself among the miners. It was said, too, that he had just obtained promotion. He had even been seen walking about with his successor, a lean man, with eyes like live coals.

"Sir, sir!" stammered Maheude.

But he would not stop.

"Good night, good night, my good woman."

She found herself before her own door. Her legs would no longer carry her, and she went in.

No one had stirred. Maheu was still at the edge of the table in dejection. Old Bonnemort and the little ones were squeezed together on the bench for the sake of warmth. And they had not said a word, and the candle had burned so low that even light would soon fail them. At the sound of the door the children turned their heads, but seeing that their mother brought nothing back, they looked down at the earth again, repressing the longing to cry for fear of being scolded. Maheude fell back into her place near the dying fire. They asked her no questions, and the silence continued. All had understood, and they thought it useless to weary themselves more by talking; they were now waiting, despairing and without courage, in the last expectation that perhaps Etienne would unearth help somewhere. The minutes went by, and at last they no longer reckoned on this.

When Etienne reappeared he held a cloth containing a dozen potatoes, cooked but cold.

"That's all that I've found," he said.

With Mouquette, also, bread was wanting; it was her dinner which she had forced him to take in this cloth, kissing him with all her heart.

"Thanks," he said to Maheude, who offered him his share. "I've eaten over there."

It was not true, and he gloomily watched the children throw themselves on the food. The father and mother also restrained themselves in order to leave more, but the old man greedily swallowed everything. They had to take a potato away from him for Alzire.

Then Etienne said that he had heard news. The company, irritated by the obstinacy of the strikers, talked of giving back their certificates to the compromised miners. Certainly the company was for war. And a more serious rumor circulated: they boasted of having persuaded a large number of men to go down again. On the next day the Victoire and Feutry-Cantel would be complete; even at Madeleine and Mirou there would be a third of the men. The Maheus were exasperated.

"By God!" shouted the father. "If there are traitors we must settle their account."

And standing up, yielding to the fury of his suffering:

"Tomorrow evening, to the forest! Since they won't let us come to an understanding at the Bon-Joyeux, we can be at home in the forest!"

This cry had aroused old Bonnemort, who had grown drowsy after his gluttony. It was the old rallying cry, the rendezvous where the miners of old days used to plot their resistance to the king's soldiers.

"Yes, yes, to Vandame! I'm with you if you go there!"

Maheude made an energetic gesture.

"We will all go. That will finish these injustices and treacheries."

Etienne decided that the rendezvous should be announced to all the settlements for the following evening. But the fire was dead, as with the Levaques, and the candle suddenly went out. There was no more coal and no more oil; they had to feel their way to bed in the intense cold which contracted the skin. The little ones were crying.

CHAPTER VI

JEANLIN was now well and able to walk, but his legs had united so badly that he limped both on the right and left sides and moved with the gait of a duck, though running as fast as formerly, with the skill of a mischievous and thieving animal.

On this evening, in the dusk on the Réquillart road, Jeanlin, accompanied by his inseparable friends Bébert and Lydie, was on the watch. He had taken ambush in a vacant space behind a paling opposite an obscure grocery shop, situated at the corner of a lane. An old woman who was nearly blind displayed there three or four sacks of lentils and haricots, and it was an ancient dried codfish, hanging by the door and stained with flyblows, to which his eyes were directed. Twice already he had sent Bébert to unhook it. But each time someone had appeared at the bend in the road. Always intruders in the way, one could not attend to one's affairs.

A gentleman went by on horseback, and the children flattened themselves at the bottom of the paling, for they recognized M. Hennebeau. Since the strike he was often thus seen along the roads, riding alone amid the rebellious settlements, ascertaining with quiet courage the condition of the country. And never had a stone whistled by his ears; he only met men who were silent and slow to salute him; most often he came upon lovers who cared nothing for

politics and took their fill of pleasures in holes and corners. He passed by on his trotting mare with head directed straight forward, so as to disturb nobody, while his heart was swelling with an unappeased desire amid this gormandizing of free love. He distinctly saw these small rascals, the little boys on the little girl in a heap. Even the youngsters were already amusing themselves by rubbing their misery! His eyes grew moist, and he disappeared, sitting stiffly on his saddle with his frock coat buttoned up in a military manner.

"Damned luck," said Jeanlin. "This will never finish. Go on, Bébert! Hang onto its tail!"

But two men once more appeared, and the child again stifled an oath when he heard the voice of his brother Zacharie narrating to Mouquet how he had discovered a two-franc piece sewn into one of his wife's petticoats. They both grinned with satisfaction, striking each other on the shoulder. Mouquet proposed a game of *crosse* for the next day; they would leave the *Avantage* at two o'clock and go to the *Montoire* side, near *Marchiennes*. Zacharie agreed. What was the good of bothering over the strike? Might as well amuse oneself, since there's nothing to do. And they turned the corner of the road when Etienne, who was coming along the canal, stopped them and began to talk.

"Are they going to bed here?" said Jeanlin in exasperation. "Nearly night; the old woman will be taking in her sacks."

Another miner came down toward Réquillart. Etienne went off with him, and as they passed the paling the child heard them speak of the forest; they had been obliged to put off the rendezvous to the following day for fear of not being able to announce it in one day to all the settlements.

"I say there," he whispered to his two mates, "the big affair is for tomorrow. We'll go, eh? We can get off in the afternoon."

And the road being at last free, he sent Bébert off.

"Courage! Hang onto its tail. And look out! The old woman's got her broom."

Fortunately the night had grown dark. Bébert, with a leap, hung onto the cod so that the string broke. He ran away, waving it like a kite, followed by the two others, all three galloping. The woman came out of her shop in astonishment, without understanding or being able to distinguish this band now lost in the darkness.

These scoundrels had become the terror of the country. They gradually spread themselves over it like a horde of savages. At first they had been satisfied with the yard at the *Voreux*, tumbling into the stock of coal, from which they would emerge looking like Negroes, playing at hide-and-seek amid the supply of wood, in which they lost themselves as in the depths of a virgin forest. Then they had taken the pit bank by assault; they would seat themselves on it and slide down the bare portions still boiling with interior fires; they glided among the briers in the older parts, hiding for the whole day, occupied in the quiet little games of mischievous mice. And they were constantly enlarging their conquests, scuffling among the piles of bricks until blood came, running about the fields and eating without bread all sorts of milky herbs, searching the banks of the canals to take fish from the mud and swallow them raw, and pushing

still farther, they traveled for kilometers as far as the thickets of Vandame, under which they gorged themselves with strawberries in the spring, with nuts and bilberries in summer. Soon the immense plain belonged to them.

What drove them thus from Montsou to Marchiennes, constantly on the roads with the eyes of young wolves, was the growing love of plunder. Jeanlin remained the captain of these expeditions, leading the troop on to all sorts of prey, ravaging the onion fields, pillaging the orchards, attacking shopwindows. In the country people accused the miners on strike and talked of a vast organized band. One day even he had forced Lydie to steal from her mother and made her bring him two dozen sticks of barley sugar, which Pirronne kept in a bottle on one of the boards in her window; and the little girl, who was well beaten, had not betrayed him because she trembled so before his authority. The worst was that he always gave himself the lion's share. Bébert also had to bring him the booty, happy if the captain did not hit him and keep it all.

For some time Jeanlin had abused his authority. He would beat Lydie as one beats one's lawful wife, and he profited by Bébert's credulity to send him on unpleasant adventures, amused at making a fool of this big boy, who was stronger than himself and could have knocked him over with a blow of his fist. He felt contempt for both of them and treated them as slaves, telling them that he had a princess for his mistress and that they were unworthy to appear before her. And, in fact, during the past week he would suddenly disappear at the end of a road or a turning in a path, no matter where it might be, after having ordered them with a terrible air to go back to the settlement. But first he would pocket the booty.

This was what happened on the present occasion.

"Give it up," he said, snatching the cod from his mate's hands when they stopped, all three, at a bend in the road near Réquillart.

Bébert protested.

"I want some, you know. I took it."

"Eh? What?" he cried. "You'll have some if I give you some. Not tonight, sure enough; tomorrow, if there's any left."

He pushed Lydie and placed both of them in line like soldiers shouldering arms. Then passing behind them:

"Now you must stay there five minutes without turning. By God, if you do turn there will be beasts that will eat you up. And then you will go straight back, and if Bébert touches Lydie on the way I shall know it and I shall hit you."

Then he disappeared in the shadow, so lightly that the sound of his naked feet could not be heard. The two children remained motionless for the five minutes, without looking round for fear of receiving a blow from the invisible. Slowly a great affection had grown up between them in their common terror. He was always thinking of taking her and pressing her very tight between his arms, as he had seen others do, and she, too, would have liked it, for it would have changed her to be so nicely caressed. But neither of them would have

allowed themselves to disobey. When they went away, although the night was very dark, they did not even kiss each other; they walked side by side, tenderly and despairingly, certain that if they touched one another the captain would strike them from behind.

Etienne, at the same hour, had entered Réquillart. The evening before Mouquette had begged him to return, and he returned, ashamed, feeling an inclination which he refused to acknowledge for this girl who adored him like a Christ. It was, besides, with the intention of breaking it off. He would see her; he would explain to her that she ought no longer to pursue him on account of the mates. It was not a time for pleasure; it was dishonest to thus amuse oneself when people were dying of hunger. And not having found her at home, he had decided to wait and watch the shadows of the passers-by.

Beneath the ruined steeple the old shaft opened, half blocked up above the black hole. A beam stood erect, and with a fragment of roof at the top it had the profile of a gallows; in the broken walling of the curbs stood two trees—a mountain ash and a plane—which seemed to grow from the depths of the earth. It was a corner of abandoned wildness, the grassy and fibrous entry of a gulf, embarrassed with old wood, planted with hawthorns and sloe trees, which were peopled in the spring by warblers in their nests. Wishing to avoid the great expense of keeping it up, the company, for the last ten years, had proposed to fill up this dead pit, but they were waiting to install an air shaft in the Voreux, for the ventilation furnace of the two pits, which communicated, was placed at the foot of Réquillart, of which the former winding shaft served as a conduit. They were content to consolidate the tubbing by beams placed across, preventing extraction, and they had neglected the upper galleries to watch only over the lower gallery, in which blazed the furnace, the enormous coal fire, with so powerful a draft that the rush of air produced the wind of a tempest from one end to the other of the neighboring mine. As a precaution, in order that they could still go up and down, the order had been given to furnish the conduit with ladders; only, as no one took charge of them, the ladders were rotting with dampness and in some places had already given way. Above a large brier stopped the entry of the passage, and as the first ladder had lost some rungs, it was necessary, in order to reach it, to hang onto the root of the mountain ash and then to take one's chances and fall into the blackness.

Etienne was waiting patiently, hidden behind a bush, when he heard a long rustling. He thought at first that it was the timid flight of a snake. But the sudden gleam of a match astonished him, and he was stupefied on recognizing Jeanlin, who was lighting a candle and now burying himself in the earth. He was seized with curiosity and approached the hole; the child had disappeared, and a faint gleam came from the second ladder. Etienne hesitated a moment and then let himself go, holding onto the roots. He thought for a moment that he was about to fall down the whole five hundred and eighty meters of the mine, but at last he felt a rung, and descended gently. Jeanlin had evidently heard nothing. Etienne constantly saw the light sinking beneath him, while the little one's shadow, colossal and disturbing, danced with the de-

formed gait of his distorted limbs. He kicked about his legs with the skill of a monkey, catching on with hands, feet or chin when the rungs were wanting. Ladders, seven meters in length, followed one another, some still firm, others shaky, yielding and almost broken; the steps were narrow and green, so rotten that one seemed to walk in moss, and the heat of an oven proceeded from the air shaft which was, fortunately, not very active now the strike was on, for when the furnace devoured its five thousand kilograms of coal a day one could not have risked oneself there without roasting one's hair.

"What a damned little toad!" exclaimed Etienne in a stifled voice. "Where the devil is he going to?"

Twice he had nearly fallen. His feet slid over the damp wood. If he had only had a candle like the child! But he struck himself every minute; he was only guided by the vague gleam that fled beneath him. He had already reached the twentieth ladder, and the descent still continued. Then he counted them: twenty-one, twenty-two, twenty-three, and he still went down and down. His head seemed to be swelling with the heat, and he thought that he was falling into a furnace. At last he reached a landing place and he saw the candle going off along the gallery. Thirty ladders—that made about two hundred and ten meters.

"Is he going to drag me about long?" he thought. "He must be going to bury himself in the stable."

But on the left the path which led to the stable was closed by a landslip. The journey began again, now more painful and more dangerous. Frightened bats flew about and clung to the roof of the gallery. He had to hasten so as not to lose sight of the light; only where the child passed with ease, with the suppleness of a serpent, he could not glide through without bruising his limbs. This gallery, like all the older passages, was narrow and grew narrower every day from the constant fall of soil; at certain places it was a mere tube which would eventually be effaced. In this strangling labor the torn and broken wood became a peril, threatening to saw into his flesh or to run him through with the points of splinters, sharp as swords. He could only advance with precaution, on his knees or belly, feeling in the darkness before him. Suddenly a band of rats stamped over him, running from his neck to his feet in their galloping flight.

"Blast it all! Haven't we got to the end yet?" he grumbled with aching back and out of breath.

They were there. At the end of a kilometer the tube enlarged; they reached a part of the gallery which was admirably preserved. It was the end of the old haulage passage cut across the bed like a natural grotto. He was obliged to stop; he saw the child afar, placing his candle between two stones and putting himself at ease with the quiet and relieved air of a man who is glad to be at home again. This gallery end was completely changed into a comfortable dwelling. In a corner on the ground a pile of hay made a soft couch; on some old planks, placed like a table, there were bread, potatoes and bottles of gin already opened; it was a real brigand's cavern, with booty piled up for weeks, even useless booty like soap and blacking, stolen for the pleasure of stealing.

And the child, quite alone in the midst of this plunder, was enjoying it like a selfish brigand.

"I say then, is this how you make fun of people?" cried Etienne when he had breathed for a moment. "You come and gorge yourself here when we are dying of hunger up above?"

Jeanlin, astounded, was trembling. But recognizing the young man, he quickly grew calm.

"Will you come and dine with me?" he said at last. "Eh? A bit of grilled cod? You shall see."

He had not let go his cod and he began to scrape off the flyblows properly with a fine new knife, one of those little dagger knives with bone handles, on which mottoes are inscribed. This one simply bore the word "Amour."

"You have a fine knife," remarked Etienne.

"It's a present from Lydie," replied Jeanlin, who neglected to add that Lydie had stolen it, by his orders, from a huckster at Montsou, stationed before the Tête-Coupée bar.

Then as he still scraped he added proudly:

"Isn't it comfortable in my house? It's a bit warmer than up above, and it feels a lot better!"

Etienne had seated himself and was amused in making him talk. He was no longer angry; he felt interested in this debauched child who was so brave and so industrious in his vices. And, in fact, he tasted a certain comfort in the bottom of this hole; the heat was not too great; an equal temperature reigned here at all seasons, the warmth of a bath, while the rough December wind was chapping the skins of the miserable people on the earth. As they grew old the galleries became purified from noxious gases; all the firedamp had gone, and one only smelled now the odor of old fermented wood, a subtle, ethereal odor, as if sharpened with a dash of cloves. This wood, besides, had become curious to look at, with a yellowish pallor of marble, fringed with whitish thread lace, flaky vegetations which seemed to drape it with an embroidery of silk and pearls. In other places the timber was bristling with toadstools. And there were flights of white butterflies, snowy flies and spiders, a decolorized population forever ignorant of the sun.

"Then you're not afraid?" asked Etienne.

Jeanlin looked at him in astonishment.

"Afraid of what? I am quite alone."

But the cod was at last scraped. He lit a little fire of wood, brought out the pan and grilled it. Then he cut a loaf into two. It was a terribly salty feast but exquisite, all the same, for strong stomachs.

Etienne had accepted his share.

"I am not astonished you get fat while we are all growing lean. Do you know that it is beastly to stuff yourself like this? And the others? You don't think of them!"

"Oh, why are the others such fools?"

"Well, you're right to hide yourself, for if your father knew you stole he would settle you."

"What! When the bourgeois are stealing from us! It's you who are always saying so. If I nabbed this loaf at Maigrat's you may be pretty sure it's a loaf he owed us."

The young man was silent, with his mouth full, and felt troubled. He looked at him with his muzzle, his green eyes, his large ears, a degenerate abortion, with an obscure intelligence and savage cunning, slowly gaining back the animality of old. The mine which had made him had just finished him by breaking his legs.

"And Lydie?" asked Etienne again. "Do you bring her here sometimes?"

Jeanlin laughed contemptuously.

"The little one? Ah no, not I; women blab."

And he went on laughing, filled with immense disdain for Lydie and Béberr, Who had ever seen such boobies? To think that they swallowed all this humbug and went away with empty hands while he ate the cod in this warm place tickled his sides with amusement. Then he concluded with the gravity of a little philosopher:

"Much better be alone, then there's no falling out."

Etienne had finished his bread. He drank a gulp of the gin. For a moment he asked himself if he ought not to make a bad return for Jeanlin's hospitality by bringing him up to daylight by the ear and forbidding him to plunder any more by the threat of telling everything to his father. But as he examined this deep retreat an idea occurred to him. Who knows if there might not be need for it, either for mates or for himself, in case things should come to the worst up above? He made the child swear not to sleep out, as had sometimes happened when he forgot himself in his hay, and taking a candle end, he went away first, leaving him to pursue quietly his domestic arrangements.

Mouquette, seated on a beam in spite of the great cold, had grown desperate in waiting for him. When she saw him she leaped onto his neck, and it was as though he had plunged a knife into her heart when he said that he wished to see her no more. Good God, why? Did she not love him enough? Fearing to yield to the desire to enter with her, he drew her toward the road and explained to her as gently as possible that she was compromising him in the eyes of his mates, that she was compromising the political cause. She was astonished; what had that got to do with politics? At last the thought occurred to her that he blushed at being seen with her. She was not wounded, however; it was quite natural, and she proposed that he should rebuff her before people, so as to seem to have broken with her. But he would see her just once sometimes. In distraction she implored him; she swore to keep out of sight; she would not keep him five minutes. He was touched but still refused. It was necessary. Then as he left her he wished at least to kiss her. They had gradually reached the first houses of Montsou and were standing with their arms round one another beneath a large round moon, when a woman passed near them with a sudden start, as though she had knocked against a stone.

"Who is that?" asked Etienne anxiously.

"It's Catherine," replied Mouquette. "She's coming back from Jean-Bart."

The woman now was going away with lowered head and feeble limbs,

looking very tired. And the young man gazed at her in despair at having been seen by her, his heart aching with an unreasonable remorse. Had she not been with a man? Had she not made him suffer with the same suffering here, on this Réquillart road, when she had given herself to that man? But all the same, he was grieved to have done the like to her.

"Shall I tell you what it is?" whispered Mouquette in tears, as she left him. "If you don't want me it's because you want someone else."

On the next day the weather was superb; it was one of those clear frosty days, the beautiful winter days when the hard earth rings like crystal beneath the feet. Jeanlin had gone off at one o'clock, but he had to wait for Bébert behind the church, and they nearly set out without Lydie, whose mother had again shut her up in the cellar and only now liberated her to put a basket on her arm, telling her that if she did not bring it back full of dandelions she would be shut up with the rats all night long. She was frightened, therefore, and wished to go at once for salad. Jeanlin dissuaded her; they would see later on. For a long time Poland, Rasseneur's big rabbit, had attracted his attention. He was passing before the *Avantage* when just then the rabbit came out onto the road. With a leap he seized her by the ears, stuffed her into the little girl's basket, and all three rushed away. They would amuse themselves finely by making her run like a dog as far as the forest.

But they stopped to gaze at Zacharie and Mouquet, who, after having drunk a glass with two other mates, had begun their big game of *crosse*. The stake was a new cap and a red handkerchief, deposited with Rasseneur. The four players, two against two, were bidding for the first turn from the *Voreux* to the *Paillot* farm, nearly three kilometers, and it was Zacharie who won with seven strokes, while Mouquet required eight. They had placed the ball, the little boxwood egg, on the pavement with one end up. Each was holding his *crosse*, the mallet with its bent iron, long handle and tightly drawn network. Two o'clock struck as they set out. Zacharie, in a masterly manner, at his first stroke, composed of a series of three, sent the ball more than four hundred yards across the beetroot fields, for it was forbidden to play in the village and on the streets, where people might be killed. Mouquet, who was also a good player, sent off the ball with so vigorous an arm that his single stroke brought the ball a hundred and fifty meters behind. And the game went on, backward and forward, both sides, always running, their feet bruised by the frozen ridges of the plowed fields.

At first Jeanlin, Bébert and Lydie had trotted behind the players, delighted with their vigorous strokes. Then they remembered Poland, whom they were shaking up in the basket; and, leaving the game in the open country, they took out the rabbit, inquisitive to see how fast she could run. She went off and they fled after her; it was a chase lasting an hour at full speed, with constant turns, with shouts to frighten her and arms opened and closed on emptiness. If she had not been at the beginning of pregnancy they would never have caught her again.

As they were panting the sound of oaths made them turn their heads. They had just come upon the *crosse* party again, and Zacharie had nearly split open

his brother's skull. The players were now at their fourth turn. From the Paillot farm they had gone off to the Quatre-Chemins, then from the Quatre-Chemins to Montoire, and now they were going in six strokes from Montoire to Pré-des-Vaches. That made two leagues and a half in an hour; and, besides, they had had drinks at the Estaminet Vincent and at the Trois-Sages bar. Mouquet this time was ahead. He had two more strokes to play, and his victory was certain, when Zacharie, grinning as he availed himself of his privilege, played with so much skill that the ball rolled into a deep pit. Mouquet's partner could not get it out; it was a disaster. All four shouted; the party was excited, for they were neck to neck; it was necessary to begin again. From the Pré-des-Vaches it was not two kilometers to the point of Herbes-Rousses, in five strokes. There they would refresh themselves at Lerenard's.

But Jeanlin had an idea. He let them go on and pulled out of his pocket a piece of string which he tied to one of Poland's legs, the left hind leg. And it was very amusing. The rabbit ran before the three young rascals, waddling along in such an extraordinary manner that they had never laughed so much before. Afterward they fastened it round her neck and let her run off, and as she grew tired, they dragged her on her belly or on her back, just like a little carriage. That lasted for more than an hour. She was moaning when they quickly put her back into the basket near the wood at Cruchot, on hearing the players, whose game they had once more come across.

Zacharie, Mouquet and the two others took two kilometers, with no other rest than the time for a drink at all the inns which they had fixed on as their goals. From the Herbes-Rousses they had gone on to Buchy, then to Croix-de-Pierre, then to Chamblay. The earth rang beneath the helter-skelter of their feet rushing untiringly after the ball, which bounded over the ice; it was a good time; only they ran the risk of breaking their legs. In the dry air the great crosse blows exploded like firearms. Their muscular hands grasped the strung handle; their entire bodies were bent forward, as though to slay an ox. And this went on for hours, from one end of the plain to the other, over ditches and hedges and the slopes of the road, the low walls of the enclosures. One needed to have good bellows in one's chest and iron hinges in one's knees. The pikemen thus rubbed off the rust of the mine with impassioned zeal. There were some so enthusiastic at twenty-five that they could do ten leagues. At forty they played no more; they were too heavy.

Five o'clock struck; the twilight was already coming on. One more turn before the forest of Vandame to decide who had gained the cap and the handkerchief. And Zacharie joked, with his chaffing indifference for politics; it would be fine to tumble down over there in the midst of the mates. As to Jeanlin, ever since leaving the settlement he had been aiming at the forest, though apparently only scouring the fields. With an indignant gesture he threatened Lydie, who was full of remorse and fear and talked of going back to the Voreux to gather dandelions. Were they going to abandon the meeting? He wanted to know what the old people would say. He pushed Bébert and proposed to enliven the end of the journey as far as the trees by detaching Poland and pursuing her with stones. His real idea was to kill her; he wanted to take

her off and eat her at the bottom of his hole at Réquillart. The rabbit ran ahead with nose in the air and ears back; a stone grazed her back; another cut her tail, and in spite of the growing darkness she would have been done for if the young rogues had not noticed Etienne and Maheu standing in the middle of a glade. They threw themselves on the animal in fear and put her back again into the basket. Almost at the same minute Zacharie, Mouquet and the two others, with their last blow at crosse, drove the ball within a few meters of the glade. They all came into the midst of the rendezvous.

Through the whole country, by the roads and pathways of the flat plain, ever since twilight, there had been a long procession, a rustling of silent shadows, moving separately or in groups toward the violet thickets of the forest. Every settlement was emptied, the women and children themselves set out as if for a walk beneath the great clear sky. Now the roads were growing dark; this walking crowd, all gliding toward the same goal, could no longer be distinguished. But one felt it, the confused tramping moved by one soul. Between the hedges, among the bushes, there was everywhere a light rustling, a vague rumor of the voices of the night.

M. Hennebeau, who was at this hour returning home, mounted on his mare, listened to these vague sounds. He had met couples, long rows of strollers, on this beautiful winter night. Mere lovers, who were going to take their pleasure, mouth to mouth, behind the walls. Was it not what he always met—girls tumbled over at the bottom of every ditch, beggars who crammed themselves with the only joy that cost nothing? And these fools complained of life when they could take their supreme fill of this happiness of love! Willingly would he have starved as they did if he could begin life again with a woman who would give herself to him on a heap of stones with all her strength and all her heart. His misfortune was without consolation, and he envied these wretches. With lowered head he went back, riding his horse at a slackened pace, rendered desperate by these long sounds, lost in the depth of the black country in which he only heard kisses.

CHAPTER VII

IT WAS THE PLAN-DES-DAMES, that vast glade just opened up by the felling of trees. It spread out in a gentle slope, surrounded by tall thickets and superb beeches with straight, regular trunks, which formed a white colonnade patched with green lichens; fallen giants were also lying in the grass, while on the left a mass of logs formed a geometrical cube. The cold was sharpening with the twilight, and the frozen moss crackled beneath the feet. There was black darkness on the earth while the white branches showed against the pale sky, where a full moon coming above the horizon would soon extinguish the stars.

Nearly three thousand colliers had come to the rendezvous, a swarming crowd of men, women and children, gradually filling the glade and spreading out afar beneath the trees. Late arrivals were still coming up, a flood of heads drowned in shadow and stretching as far as the neighboring copses. A

rumbling arose from them, like that of a storm, in this motionless and frozen forest.

At the top, dominating the slope, Etienne stood with Rasseneur and Maheu. A quarrel had broken out; one could hear their voices in sudden bursts. Near them some men were listening: Levaque, with clenched fists; Pierron, turning his back and much annoyed that he had no longer been able to feign a fever. There were also Father Bonnemort and old Mouque, seated side by side on a stump, lost in deep meditation. Then behind were the chaffers, Zacharie, Mouquet and others who had come to make fun of the thing, while gathered together in a very different spirit the women in a group were as serious as if at church. Maheude silently shook her head at the Levaque woman's muttered oaths. Philomène was coughing, her bronchitis having come back with the winter. Only Mouquette was showing her teeth with laughter, amused at the way in which Mother Brûlé was abusing her daughter, an unnatural creature who had sent her away that she might gorge herself with rabbit, a creature who had sold herself and who fattened on her man's cowardice. And Jeanlin had planted himself on the pile of wood, hoisting up Lydie and making Bébert follow him, all three higher up in the air than anyone else.

The quarrel was raised by Rasseneur, who wished to proceed formally to the election of officers. He was enraged by his defeat at the Bon-Joyeux and had sworn to have his revenge, for he flattered himself that he could regain his old authority when he was once face to face, not with the delegates, but with the miners themselves. Etienne was disgusted and thought that the idea of officers was ridiculous in this forest. They ought to act in a revolutionary fashion, like savages, since they were tracked like wolves.

As the dispute threatened to drag on he took possession of the crowd at once by jumping onto the trunk of a tree and shouting:

"Comrades! Comrades!"

The confused roar of the crowd died down into a long sigh, while Maheu stifled Rasseneur's protestations. Etienne went on in a loud voice:

"Comrades, since they forbid us to speak, since they send the police after us as if we were robbers, we have come to talk here! Here we are free; we are at home. No one can silence us any more than they can silence birds and beasts!"

A thunder of cries and exclamations responded to him.

"Yes, yes! The forest is ours; we can talk here. Go on."

Then Etienne stood for a moment, motionless on the tree trunk. The moon, still beneath the horizon, only lit up the topmost branches, and the crowd, remaining in the darkness, gradually grew calm and silent. He, also in darkness, stood above it at the top of the slope like a bar of shadow.

He raised his arm with a slow movement and began. But his voice was not fierce; he spoke in the cold tones of a simple envoy of the people, who was rendering his account. He was delivering the discourse which the commissioner of police had cut short at the Bon-Joyeux, and he began by a rapid history of the strike, affecting a certain scientific eloquence—facts, nothing but facts. At first he spoke of his dislike to the strike: the miners had not desired it; it was

the management which had provoked it with the new timbering tariff. Then he recalled the first step taken by the delegates in going to the manager, the bad faith of the directors and, later on, the second step, the tardy concession, the ten centimes given up after the attempt to rob them. Now he showed by figures the exhaustion of the provident fund and pointed out the use that had been made of the help sent, briefly excusing the International, Pluchart and the others, for not being able to do more for them in the midst of the cares of their conquest of the world. So the situation was getting worse every day; the company was giving back certificates and threatening to hire men from Belgium; besides, it was intimidating the weak and had forced a certain number of miners to go down again. He preserved his monotonous voice, as if to insist on the bad news; he said that hunger was victorious, that hope was dead and that the struggle had reached the last feverish efforts of courage. And then he suddenly concluded without raising his voice:

"It is in these circumstances, mates, that you have to take a decision tonight. Do you want the strike to go on? And if so, what do you expect to do to beat the company?"

A deep silence fell from the starry sky. The crowd, which could not be seen, was silent in the night beneath these words which choked every heart, and a sigh of despair could be heard through the trees.

But Etienne was already continuing with a change in his voice. It was no longer the secretary of the association who was speaking; it was the chief of a band, the apostle who was bringing truth. Could it be that any were cowardly enough to go back on their word? What? They were to suffer in vain for a month and then to go back to the pits with lowered heads, so that the everlasting wretchedness might begin over again! Would it not be better to die at once in the effort to destroy this tyranny of capital, which was starving the worker? Always to submit to hunger up to the moment when hunger would again throw the calmest into revolt, was it not a foolish game which could not go on forever? And he pointed to the exploited miners, bearing alone the disasters of every crisis, reduced to go without food as soon as the necessities of competition lowered net prices. No, the timbering tariff could not be accepted; it was only a disguised effort to economize on the company's part; they wanted to rob every man of an hour's work a day. It was too much this time; the day was coming when the miserable, pushed to extremity, would wreak justice.

He stood with his arms in the air. At the word "justice" the crowd, shaken by a long shudder, broke out into applause which rolled along with the sound of dry leaves. Voices cried:

"Justice! It is time! Justice!"

Gradually Etienne grew heated. He had not Rasseneur's easy-flowing abundance. Words often failed him; he had to force his phrases, bringing them out with an effort which he emphasized by a movement of his shoulders. Only in these continual shocks he came upon familiar images which seized on his audience by their energy, while his workman's gestures, his elbows in and then extended, with his fists thrust out, his jaw suddenly advanced as if

to bite, had also an extraordinary effect on his mates. They all said that if he was not big he made himself heard.

"The wage system is a new form of slavery," he began again in a more sonorous voice. "The mine ought to belong to the miner, as the sea belongs to the fisherman and the earth to the peasant. Do you see? The mine belongs to you, to all of you who, for a century, have paid for it with so much blood and misery!"

He boldly entered on the obscure questions of law and lost himself in the difficulties of the special regulations concerning mines. The subsoil, like the soil, belonged to the nation: only an odious privilege gave the monopoly of it to the companies; all the more since, at Montsou, the pretended legality of the concession was complicated by treaties formally made with the owners of the old fiefs, according to the ancient custom of Hainault. The miners, then, had only to reconquer their property; and with extended hands he indicated the whole country beyond the forest. At this moment the moon, which had risen above the horizon, lit him up as it glided from behind the high branches. When the crowd, which was still in shadow, thus saw him, white with light, distributing fortune with his open hands, they applauded anew by prolonged clapping.

"Yes, yes, he's right! Bravo!"

Then Etienne trotted out his favorite subject, the assumption of the instruments of production by the collectivity, as he repeated it in a phrase, the pedantry of which greatly pleased him. At the present time his evolution was completed. Having set out with the sentimental fraternity of the novice and the need for reforming the wage system, he had reached the political idea of its suppression. Since the meeting at the Bon-Joyeux his collectivism, still humanitarian and without a formula, had stiffened into a complicated program which he discussed scientifically, article by article. First he affirmed that freedom could only be obtained by the destruction of the state. Then when the people had obtained possession of the government reforms would begin: return to the primitive commune; substitution of an equal and free family for the moral and oppressive family; absolute equality, civil, political and economic; individual independence guaranteed, thanks to the possession and the integral product of the instruments of work; finally, free and professional education, paid for by the collectivity. This led to the total reconstruction of the old rotten society; he attacked marriage, the right of testament; he regulated everyone's fortune; he threw down the iniquitous monument of the dead centuries with a great movement of his arm, always the same movement, the movement of the reaper who is cutting down a ripe harvest. And then with the other hand he reconstructed; he built up the future of humanity, the edifice of truth and justice rising in the dawn of the twentieth century. In this state of mental tension reason trembled, and only the sectarian's fixed idea was left. The scruples of sensibility and of good sense were lost; nothing seemed easier than the realization of this new world. He had foreseen everything; he spoke of it as of a machine which he could put together in two hours, and he stuck at neither fire nor blood.

"Our turn is come," he broke out for the last time. "Now it is for us to have power and wealth!"

The cheering rolled up to him from the depths of the forest. The moon now whitened the whole of the glade and cut into living waves the sea of heads, as far as the confused copes between the great gray trunks in the distance. And in the icy air there was a fury of faces, of gleaming eyes, of open mouths, a rut of famishing men, women and children, let loose on the just pillage of the ancient wealth they had been deprived of. They no longer felt the cold; these burning words had warmed them to the bone. Religious exaltation raised them from the earth, a fever of hope like that of the Christians of the early church awaiting the near coming of justice. Many obscure phrases had escaped them; they could not at all understand this technical and abstract reasoning, but the very obscurity and abstraction still further enlarged the field of promises and lifted them into a dazzling region. What a dream! To be masters, to suffer no more, to enjoy at last!

"That's it, by God! It's our turn now! Down with the exploiters."

The women were delirious; Maheude, losing her calmness, was seized with the vertigo of hunger; the Levaque woman shouted; old Brûlé, carried out of herself, was brandishing her witchlike arms; Philomène was shaken by a spasm of coughing, and Mouquette was so excited that she cried out words of tenderness to the orator. Among the men Maheu was won over and shouted with anger, between Pierron who was trembling and Levaque who was talking too much, while the chaffers, Zacharie and Mouquet, though trying to make fun of things, were feeling uncomfortable and were surprised that their mate could talk on so long without having a drink. I . . . on top of the pile of wood Jeanlin was making more noise than anyone, egging on Bébert and Lydie and shaking the basket in which Poland lay.

The clamor began again. Etienne was enjoying the intoxication of his popularity. He held his power, as it were, materialized in these three thousand breasts, whose hearts he could move with a word. Souvarine, if he had cared to come, would have applauded his ideas so far as he recognized them, pleased with his pupil's progress in anarchy and satisfied with the program, except the article on education, a relic of silly sentimentality, for men needed to be dipped in a bath of holy and salutary ignorance. As to Rasseneur, he shrugged his shoulders with contempt and anger.

"You shall let me speak," he shouted to Etienne.

The latter jumped from the tree trunk.

"Speak; we shall see if they'll hear you."

Already Rasseneur had replaced him and with a gesture demanded silence. But the noise did not cease; his name went round from the first ranks, who had recognized him, to the last, lost beneath the beeches, and they refused to hear him; he was an overturned idol; the mere sight of him angered his old disciples. His facile elocution, his flowing, good-natured speech, which had so long charmed them, was now treated like warm gruel made to put cowards to sleep. In vain he talked through the noise, trying to take up again his discourse of conciliation, the impossibility of changing the world by a stroke of

law, the necessity of allowing the social evolution time to accomplish itself; they joked him; they damned him; his defeat at the Bon-Joyeux was now beyond repair. At last they threw handfuls of frozen moss at him, and a woman cried in a shrill voice:

"Down with the traitor!"

He explained that the miner could not be the proprietor of the mine, as the weaver who owns his trade, and he said that he preferred sharing in the benefits, the interested worker becoming the child of the house.

"Down with the traitor!" repeated a thousand voices while stones began to whistle by.

Then he turned pale, and despair filled his eyes with tears. His whole existence was crumbling down; twenty years of ambitious comradeship were breaking down beneath the ingratitude of the crowd. He came down from the tree trunk with no strength to go on, struck to the heart.

"That makes you laugh," he stammered, addressing the triumphant Etienne. "Good! I hope your turn will come. It will come, I tell you!"

And as if to reject all responsibility for the evils which he foresaw, he made a large gesture and went away alone across the country, pale and silent.

Hoots arose, and then they were surprised to see Father Bonnemort standing on the trunk and about to speak in the midst of the tumult. Up till now Mouque and he had remained absorbed, with that air that they always had of reflecting on former things. No doubt he was yielding to one of those sudden crises of garrulity which sometimes made the past stir in him so violently that recollections rose and flowed from his lips for hours at a time. There was deep silence, and they listened to this old man, who was like a pale specter beneath the moon, and as he narrated things without any immediate relation with the discussion—long histories which no one could understand—the impression was increased. He was talking of his youth; he described the death of his two uncles who were crushed at the Voreux; then he turned to the inflammation of the lungs which had carried off his wife. He kept to a main idea, however: things had never gone well and never would go well. Thus in the forest five hundred of them had come together because the king would not lessen the hours of work, but he stopped short and began to tell of another strike—he had seen so many! They all broke out under these trees here at the Plans-des-Dames, lower down at the Charbonnerie, still farther toward the Saut-du-Loup. Sometimes it froze; sometimes it was hot. One evening it had rained so much that they had gone back again without being able to say anything, and the king's soldiers came up, and it finished with volleys of musketry.

"We raised our hands like this, and we swore not to go back again. Ah! I have sworn; yes, I have sworn!"

The crowd listened gapingly, feeling disturbed, when Etienne, who had watched the scene, jumped onto the fallen tree, keeping the old man at his side. He had just recognized Chaval among their friends in the first row. The idea that Catherine must be there had roused a new ardor within him, the desire to be applauded in her presence.

"Mates, you have heard; this is one of our old men and this is what he has suffered and what our children will suffer if we don't have done with the robbers and butchers."

He was terrible; never had he spoken so violently. With one arm he supported old Bonnemort, exhibiting him as a banner of misery and mourning and crying for vengeance. In a few rapid phrases he went back to the first Maheu. He showed the whole family used up at the mine, devoured by the company, hungrier than ever after a hundred years of work; and, contrasting with the Maheus, he pointed to the big bellies of the directors sweating with gold, a whole band of kept shareholders, going on for a century like kept women, doing nothing but enjoy with their bodies. Was it not fearful? A race of men dying down below, from father to son, so that bribes of wine could be given to ministers and generations of great lords and bourgeois could give feasts or fatten by their firesides! He had studied the diseases of the miners. He made them all march past with their awful details: anemia, scrofula, black bronchitis, the asthma which chokes and the rheumatism which paralyzes. These wretches were thrown as food to the engines and penned up like beasts in the settlements. The great companies slowly absorbed them, regulating their slavery, threatening to enroll all the workers of the nation, millions of hands, to bring fortune to a thousand idlers. But the miner was no longer an ignorant brute, crushed within the bowels of the earth. An army was springing up from the depths of the pits, a harvest of citizens whose seed would germinate and burst through the earth some sunny day. And they would see then if, after forty years of service, anyone would dare to offer a pension of a hundred and fifty francs to an old man of sixty who spat out coal and whose legs were swollen with the water from the cuttings. Yes, labor would demand an account from capital: that impersonal god, unknown to the worker, crouching down somewhere in his mysterious sanctuary, where he sucked the life out of the starvelings who nourished him! They would go down there; they would at last succeed in seeing his face by the gleam of incendiary fires; they would drown him in blood, that filthy swine, that monstrous idol, gorged with human flesh!

He was silent, but his arm, still extended in space, indicated the enemy down there—he knew not where—from one end of the earth to the other. This time the clamor of the crowd was so great that people at Montsou heard it and looked toward Vandame, seized with anxiety at the thought that some terrible landslip had occurred. Night birds rose above the trees in the clear open sky.

He now concluded his speech.

"Mates, what is your decision? Do you vote for the strike to go on?"

Their voices yelled, "Yes! Yes!"

"And what steps do you decide on? We are sure of defeat if cowards go down tomorrow."

Their voices rose again with the sound of a tempest:

"Kill the cowards!"

"Then you decide to call them back to duty and to their sworn word. This

is what we could do: present ourselves at the pits, bring back the traitors by our presence, show the company that we are all agreed and that we are going to die rather than yield."

"That's it. To the pits! To the pits!"

While he was speaking Etienne had looked for Catherine among the pale shouting heads before him. She was certainly not there, but he still saw Chaval, affecting to jeer, shrugging his shoulders, but devoured by jealousy and ready to sell himself for a little of this popularity.

"And if there are any spies among us, mates," Etienne went on, "let them look out; they're known. Yes, I can see Vandame colliers here who have not left their pit."

"Is that meant for me?" asked Chaval with an air of bravado.

"For you or for anyone else. But since you speak, you ought to understand that those who eat have nothing to do with those who are starving. You work at Jean-Bart."

A chaffing voice interrupted:

"Oh, he works! He's got a wife who works for him."

Chaval swore while the blood rose to his face.

"By God, is it forbidden to work then?"

"Yes!" said Etienne. "When your mates are enduring misery for the good of all it is forbidden to go over, like a selfish, sneaking coward, to the masters' side. If the strike had been general we should have got the best of it long ago. Not a single man at Vandame ought to have gone down when Montsou is resting. To accomplish the great stroke work should be stopped in the entire country, at Monsieur Deneulin's as well as here. Do you understand? There are only traitors in the Jean-Bart cuttings; you're all traitors!"

The crowd around Chaval grew threatening, and fists were raised and cries of "Kill him! Kill him!" began to be uttered. He had grown pale. But in his infuriated desire to triumph over Etienne an idea restored him.

"Listen to me, then! Come tomorrow to Jean-Bart, and you shall see if I'm working! We're on your side; they've sent me to tell you so. The fire shall be extinguished, and the enginemen, too, must go on strike. All the better if the pumps do stop! The water will destroy the pits, and everything will be done for!"

He was furiously applauded in his turn, and now Etienne himself was outflanked. Other orators succeeded each other from the tree trunk, gesticulating amid the tumult and throwing out wild propositions. It was a mad outburst of faith, the impatience of a religious sect which, tired of hoping for the expected miracle, had at last decided to provoke it. These heads, emptied by famine, saw everything red and dreamed of fire and blood in the midst of a glorious apotheosis from which would arise universal happiness. And the tranquil moon bathed this sea; the deep forest encircled with its fast silence this cry of massacre. The frozen moss crackled beneath the heels of the crowd, while the beeches, erect in their strength, with the delicate tracery of their black branches against the white sky, neither saw nor heard the miserable beings who writhed at their feet.

There was some pushing, and Maheude found herself near Maheu. Both of them, driven out of their ordinary good sense and carried away by the slow exasperation which had been working within them for months, approved Levaque, who went to extremes by demanding the heads of the engineers. Pierron had disappeared. Bonnemort and Mouque were both talking together, saying vague, violent things which nobody heard. For a joke Zacharie demanded the demolition of the churches, while Mouquet, with his crosse in his hand, was beating it against the ground for the sake of increasing the row. The women were furious. The Levaque, with her fists to her hips, was setting to with Philomène, whom she accused of having laughed; Mouquette talked of attacking the gendarmes by kicking them somewhere; Mother Brûlé, who had just slapped Lydie on finding her without either basket or salad, went on striking into space for all the masters whom she would like to have got at. For a moment Jeanlin was in terror, Bébert having learned through a trammer that Mme Rasseneur had seen them steal Poland, but when he had decided to go back and quietly release the beast at the door of the Avantage he shouted louder than ever and opened his new knife, brandishing the blade and proud of its glitter.

"Mates! Mates!" repeated the exhausted Etienne, hoarse with the effort to obtain a moment's silence for a definite understanding.

At last they listened.

"Mates! Tomorrow morning at Jean-Bart; is it agreed?"

"Yes! Yes! At Jean-Bart! Death to the traitors!"

The tempest of these three thousand voices filled the sky and died away in the pure brightness of the moon.

PART FIVE

CHAPTER I

AT FOUR O'CLOCK the moon had set, and the night was very dark. Everything was still asleep at Deneulin's; the old brick house stood mute and gloomy, with closed doors and windows, at the end of the large ill-kept garden which separated it from the Jean-Bart mine. The other frontage faced the deserted road to Vandame, a large country town about three kilometers off, hidden behind the forest.

Deneulin, tired after a day spent in part below, was snoring with his face toward the wall, when he dreamed that he had been called. At last he awoke and, really hearing a voice, got out and opened the window. One of his captains was in the garden.

"What is it then?" he asked.

"There's a rebellion, sir; half the men will not work and are preventing the others from going down."

He scarcely understood, with head heavy and dazed with sleep, and the great cold struck him like an icy douche.

"Then make them go down, by George!" he stammered.

"It's been going on an hour," said the captain. "Then we thought it best to come for you. Perhaps you will be able to persuade them."

"Very good; I'll go."

He quickly dressed himself, his mind quite clear now and very anxious. The house might have been pillaged; neither the cook nor the manservant had stirred. But from the other side of the staircase alarmed voices were whispering, and when he came out he saw his daughters' door open, and they both appeared in white dressing gowns, slipped on in haste.

"Father, what is it?"

Lucie, the elder, was already twenty-two, a tall, dark girl with a haughty air, while Jeanne, the younger, as yet scarcely nineteen years old, was small, with golden hair and a certain caressing grace.

"Nothing serious," he replied to reassure them. "It seems that some blusterers are making a disturbance down there. I am going to see."

But they exclaimed that they would not let him go before he had taken something warm. If not he would come back ill, with his stomach out of order, as he always did. He struggled, gave his word of honor that he was too much in a hurry.

"Listen!" said Jeanne at last, hanging to his neck. "You must drink a little glass of rum and eat two biscuits or I shall remain like this, and you'll have to take me with you."

He resigned himself, declaring that the biscuits would choke him. They had already gone down before him, each with her candlestick. In the dining room below they hastened to serve him, one pouring out the rum, the other running to the pantry for the biscuits. Having lost their mother when very young, they had been rather badly brought up alone, spoiled by their father, the elder haunted by the dream of singing on the stage, the younger mad over painting, in which she showed a singular boldness of taste. But when they had to retrench after the embarrassment in their affairs, these apparently extravagant girls had suddenly developed into very sensible and shrewd managers, with an eye for errors of centimes in accounts. Today, with their boyish and artistic demeanor, they kept the purse, were careful over sous, haggled with the tradesmen, renovated their dresses unceasingly and, in fact, succeeded in rendering decent the growing embarrassment of the house.

"Eat, Papa," repeated Lucie.

Then remarking his silent, gloomy preoccupation, she was again frightened.

"Is it serious then that you look at us like this? Tell us; we will stay with you, and they can do without us at that lunch."

She was speaking of a party which had been planned for the morning. Mme Hennebeau was to go in her carriage, first for Cécile, at the Grégoires', then to call for them, so that they could all go to Marchiennes to lunch at the forges, where the manager's wife had invited them. It was an opportunity to visit the workshops, the blast furnaces and the coke ovens.

"We will certainly remain," declared Jeanne in her turn.

But he grew angry.

"A fine idea! I tell you that it is nothing. Just be so good as to get back into your beds again and dress yourselves for nine o'clock, as was arranged."

He kissed them and hastened to leave. They heard the noise of his boots vanishing over the frozen earth in the garden.

Jeanne carefully placed the stopper in the rum bottle, while Lucie locked up the biscuits. The room had the cold neatness of dining rooms where the table is but meagerly supplied. And both of them took advantage of this early descent to see if anything had been left uncared for the evening before. A serviette lay about; the servant should be scolded. At last they were upstairs again.

While he was taking the shortest cut through the narrow paths of his kitchen garden Deneulin was thinking of his compromised fortune, this Montsou denier, this million which he had realized, dreaming to multiply it tenfold, and which was today running such great risks. It was an uninterrupted course of ill luck, enormous and unforeseen repairs, ruinous conditions of exploitation, then the disaster of this industrial crisis, just when the profits were beginning to come in. If the strike broke out here he would be overthrown. He pushed a little door: the buildings of the pit could be divined in the black night by the deepening of the shadow, starred by a few lanterns.

Jean-Bart was not so important as the Voreux, but its renewed installation made it a pretty pit, as the engineers said. They had not been contented by enlarging the shaft one meter and a half and deepening it to seven hundred and eight meters; they had equipped it afresh with a new engine, new cages, entirely new material, all set up according to the latest scientific improvements; and even a certain seeking for elegance was visible in the constructions, a screening shed with carved frieze, a steeple adorned with a clock, a receiving room and an engine room both rounded into an apse like a Renaissance chapel and surmounted by a chimney with a mosaic spiral made of black bricks and red bricks. The pump was placed on the other shaft of the concession, the old Gaston-Marie pit, reserved solely for this purpose. Jean-Bart, to right and left of the winding shaft, had only two conduits, that for the steam ventilator and that for the ladders.

In the morning, ever since three o'clock, Chaval, who had arrived first, had been seducing his comrades, convincing them that they ought to imitate those at Montsou and demand an increase of five centimes a tram. Soon four hundred workmen had passed from the shed into the receiving room, in the midst of a tumult of gesticulation and shouting. Those who wished to work stood with their lamps, barefooted, with shovel or pick beneath their arms, while the others, still in their sabots, with their overcoats on their shoulders because of the great cold, were barring the shaft; and the captains were growing hoarse in the effort to restore order, begging them to be reasonable and not to prevent those who wanted from going down.

But Chaval was furious when he saw Catherine in her trousers and jacket, her head tied up in the blue cap. On getting up he had roughly told her to

stay in bed. In despair at this arrest of work, she had followed him all the same, for he never gave her any money; she often had to pay both for herself and him, and what was to become of her if she earned nothing? She was overcome by fear, the fear of a brothel at Marchiennes, which was the end of putter girls without bread and without lodging.

"By God," cried Chaval, "what the devil have you come here for?"

She stammered that she had no income to live on and that she wanted to work.

"Then you put yourself against me, wench? Back you go at once, or I'll go back with you and kick my sabots into your backside."

She recoiled timidly but she did not leave, resolved to see how things would turn out. Deneulin had arrived by the screening stairs. In spite of the weak light of the lanterns, with a quick look he took in the scene, with this rabble wrapped in shadow; he knew every face, the pikemen, the porters, the landers, the putters, even the trimmers. In the nave, still new and clean, the arrested task was waiting; the steam in the engine, under pressure, made slight whistling sounds; the cages were hanging motionless to the cables; the trams, abandoned on the way, were encumbering the metal floors. Scarcely eighty lamps had been taken; the others were flaming in the lamp cabin. But no doubt a word from him would suffice, and the whole life of work would begin again.

"Well, what's going on then, my lads?" he asked in a loud voice. "What are you angry about? Just explain to me and we will see if we can agree."

He usually behaved in a paternal way toward his men, while at the same time demanding hard work. With an authoritative, rough manner he had tried to conquer them by a good nature which had its outbursts of passion, and he often gained their love; the men especially respected in him his courage, always in the cuttings with them, the first in danger whenever an accident terrified the pit. Twice after firedamp explosions he had been let down, fastened by a rope under his armpits, when the bravest drew back.

"Now," he began again, "you are not going to make me repent having trusted you. You know that I have refused police protection. Talk quietly and I will hear you."

All were now silent and awkward, moving away from him, and it was Chaval who at last said:

"Well, Monsieur Deneulin, we can't go on working; we must have five centimes more the tram."

He seemed surprised.

"What? Five centimes! And why this demand? I don't complain about your timbering; I don't want to impose a new tariff on you like the Montsou directors."

"Maybe! But the Montsou mates are right, all the same. They won't have the tariff and they want a rise of five centimes because it is not possible to work properly at the present rates. We want five centimes more, don't we, you others?"

Voices approved, and the noise began again in the midst of violent gesticulation. Gradually they drew near, forming a small circle.

A flame came into Deneulin's eyes, and his fist, that of a man who liked strong government, was clenched for fear of yielding to the temptation of seizing one of them by the neck. He preferred to discuss on the basis of reason.

"You want five centimes, and I agree that the work is worth it. Only I can't give it. If I gave it I should simply be done for. You must understand that I have to live first in order for you to live, and I've got to the end; the least rise in net prices will upset me. Two years ago, you remember, at the time of the last strike, I yielded; I was able to then. But that rise of wages was not the less ruinous, for these two years have been a struggle. Today I would rather let the whole thing go than not be able to tell next month where to get the money to pay you."

Chaval laughed roughly in the face of this master who told them his affairs so frankly. The others lowered their faces, obstinate and incredulous, refusing to take into their heads the idea that a master did not gain millions out of his men.

Then Deneulin, persisting, explained his struggle with Montsou, always on the watch and ready to devour him if someday he had the stupidity to come to grief. It was a savage competition which forced him to economize, the more so since the depth of Jean-Bart increased the price of extraction, an unfavorable condition, hardly compensated by the great thickness of the coal beds. He would never have raised wages after the last strike if it had not been necessary for him to imitate Montsou, for fear of seeing his men leave him. And he threatened them with the morrow; a fine result it would be for them if they obliged him to sell, to pass beneath the terrible yoke of the directors! He did not sit on a throne far away in an unknown sanctuary; he was not one of those shareholders who paid agents to skin the miner who had never seen them; he was a master; he risked something besides his money; he risked his intelligence, his health, his life. Stoppage of work would simply mean death, for he had no stock and he must fulfill orders. Besides, his standing capital could not sleep. How could he keep his engagements? Who would pay the interest on the sums his friends had confided to him? It would mean bankruptcy.

"That's where we are, my good fellows," he said in conclusion. "I want to convince you. We don't ask a man to cut his own throat, do we? And if I give you your five centimes or if I let you go out on strike it's the same as if I cut my throat."

He was silent. Grunts went round. A party among the miners seemed to hesitate. Several went back toward the shaft.

"At least," said a captain, "let everyone be free. Who are those who want to work?"

Catherine had advanced among the first. But Chaval fiercely pushed her back, shouting:

"We are all agreed; it's only bloody rogues who'll leave their mates!"

After that conciliation appeared impossible. The cries began again, and men were hustled away from the shaft at the risk of being crushed against the walls. For a moment the manager, in despair, tried to struggle alone, to reduce

the crowd by violence, but it was useless madness, and he retired. For a few minutes he rested, out of breath, on a chair in the receiver's office, so overcome by his powerlessness that no ideas came to him. At last he grew calm and told an inspector to go and bring Chaval; then when the latter had agreed to the interview he motioned the others away.

"Leave us."

Deneulin's idea was to see what this fellow was after. At the first words he felt that he was vain and was devoured by passionate jealousy. Then he attacked him by flattery, affecting surprise that a workman of his merit should so compromise his future. It seemed as though he had long had his eyes on him for rapid advancement, and he ended by squarely offering to make him captain later on. Chaval listened in silence with his fists at first clenched but then gradually unbent. Something was working in the depths of his skull; if he persisted in the strike he would be nothing more than Etienne's lieutenant, while now another ambition opened, that of passing into the ranks of the bosses. The heat of pride rose to his face and intoxicated him. Besides, the band of strikers whom he had expected since the morning had not arrived; some obstacle must have stopped them, perhaps the police; it was time to submit. But all the same he shook his head; he acted the incorruptible man, striking his breast indignantly. Then without mentioning to the master the rendezvous he had given to the Montsou men, he promised to calm his mates and to persuade them to go down.

Deneulin remained hidden, and the captains themselves stood aside. For an hour they heard Chaval perorating and discussing, standing on a tram in the receiving room. Some of the men hooted him; a hundred and twenty went off, exasperated, persisting in the resolution which he had made them take. It was already past seven. The sun was rising brilliantly; it was a bright day of hard frost, and all at once movement began in the pit, and the arrested labor went on. First the crank of the engine plunged, rolling and unrolling the cables on the drums. Then in the midst of the tumult of the signals the descent took place. The cages filled and were engulfed and rose again, the shaft swallowing its ration of trammers and putters and pikemen, while on the metal floors the landers pushed the trams with a sound of thunder.

"By God! What the devil are you doing there?" cried Chaval to Catherine, who was awaiting her turn. "Will you just go down and not laze about?"

At nine o'clock, when Mme Hennebeau arrived in her carriage with Cécile, she found Lucie and Jeanne quite ready and very elegant, in spite of their dresses having been renovated for the twentieth time. But Deneulin was surprised to see Négrel accompanying the carriage on horseback. What, were the men also in the party? Then Mme Hennebeau explained in her maternal way that they had frightened her by saying that the streets were full of evil faces, and so she preferred to bring a defender. Négrel laughed and reassured them: nothing to cause anxiety, threats of brawlers, as usual, but not one of them would dare to throw a stone at a windowpane. Still pleased with his success, Deneulin related the repressed rebellion at Jean-Bart. He said that he was now quite at rest. And on the Vandame road, while the young ladies

got into the carriage, all congratulated themselves on the superb day, oblivious to the long, swelling shudder of the marching people afar off in the country, though they might have heard the sound of it if they had pressed their ears against the earth.

"Well, it is agreed," repeated Mme Hennebeau. "This evening you will call for the young ladies and dine with us. Madame Grégoire has also promised to come for Cécile."

"You may reckon on me," replied Denculin.

The carriage went off toward Vandame, Jeanne and Lucie leaning down to laugh once more to their father, who was standing by the roadside, while Négrel gallantly trotted behind the fleeing wheels.

They crossed the forest, taking the road from Vandame to Marchiennes. As they approached Tartaret Jeanne asked Mme Hennebeau if she knew Côte-Verte, and the latter, in spite of her stay of five years in the country, acknowledged that she had never been on that side. Then they made a detour. Tartaret, on the outskirts of the forest, was an uncultivated moor of volcanic sterility, under which for ages a coal mine had been burning. Its history was lost in legend. The miners of the place said that fire from heaven had fallen on this Sodom in the bowels of the earth, where the putter girls had committed abominations together, so that they had not even had the time to come to the surface and today were still burning at the bottom of this hell. The calcined rocks of a somber red were covered by an efflorescence of alum as by a leprosy. Sulphur grew like a yellow flower at the edge of the fissures. At night those who were brave enough to venture to look into these holes declared that they saw flames there, sinful souls shriveling in the furnace within. Wandering lights moved over the soil, and hot vapors, the poisons from the devil's ordure and his dirty kitchen, were constantly smoking. And like a miracle of eternal spring in the midst of this accursed moor of Tartaret, Côte-Verte appeared with its meadows forever green, its beeches with leaves unceasingly renewed, its fields where three harvests grew ripe. It was a natural hothouse, warmed by the fire in the deep strata beneath. The snow never lay on it. The enormous bouquet of verdure, beside the leafless forest trees, blossomed on this December day, and the frost had not even scorched the edge of it.

Soon the carriage was passing over the plain. Négrel joked over the legend and explained that a fire often occurred at the bottom of a mine from the fermentation of the coal dust; if not mastered it would burn on forever, and he mentioned a Belgian pit which had been flooded by diverting a river and running it into the pit. But he became silent. For the last few minutes groups of miners had been constantly passing the carriage; they went by in silence, with sidelong looks at the luxurious equipage which forced them to stand aside. Their number went on increasing. The horses were obliged to cross the little bridge of the Scarpe at walking pace. What was going on then to bring all these people into the roads? The young ladies became frightened, and Négrel began to smell out some fray in the excited country; it was a relief when they at last arrived at Marchiennes. The batteries of coke ovens and the chimneys of the blast furnaces, beneath a sun which seemed to extin-

guish them, were belching out smoke and raining their everlasting soot through the air.

CHAPTER II

AT JEAN-BART Catherine had already been at work for an hour, pushing trams as far as the relays, and she was soaked in such a bath of perspiration that she stopped a moment to wipe her face.

At the bottom of the cutting, where he was hammering at the seam with his mates, Chaval was astonished when he no longer heard the rumble of the wheels. The lamps burned badly, and the coal dust made it impossible to see.

"What's up?" he shouted.

When she answered that she was sure she would melt and that her heart was going to stop, he replied furiously:

"Do like us, stupid! Take off your shift."

They were seven hundred and eight meters to the north in the first passage of the Désirée seam, which was at a distance of three kilometers from the pit eye. When they spoke of this part of the pit the miners of the region grew pale and lowered their voices, as if they had spoken of hell, and most often they were content to shake their heads as men who would rather not speak of these depths of fiery furnace. As the galleries sank toward the north they approached Tartaret, penetrating to that interior fire which calcined the rocks above. The cuttings at the point at which they had arrived had an average temperature of forty-five degrees. They were there in the accursed city, in the midst of the flames which the passers-by on the plain could see through the fissures, spitting out sulphur and poisonous vapors.

Catherine, who had already taken off her jacket, hesitated, then took off her trousers also; and with naked arms and naked thighs, her chemise tied round her hips by a cord like a blouse, she began to push again.

"Anyhow, that's better," she said aloud.

In the stifling heat she still felt a vague fear. Ever since they began working here five days ago she had thought of the stories told her in childhood, of those putter girls of the days of old who were burning beneath Tartaret as a punishment for things which no one dared to repeat. No doubt she was too big now to believe such silly stories, but still, what would she do if she were suddenly to see coming out of the wall a girl as red as a stove, with eyes like live coals? The idea made her perspire still more.

At the relay, eighty meters from the cutting, another putter took the tram and pushed it eighty meters farther to the upbrow, so that the receiver could forward it with the others which came down from the upper galleries.

"Gracious! You're making yourself comfortable!" said this woman, a lean widow of thirty, when she saw Catherine in her chemise. "I can't do it; the trammers at the brow bother me with their dirty tricks."

"Ah well!" replied the young girl. "I don't care about the men! I feel too bad."

She went off again, pushing an empty tram. The worst was that in this bottom passage another cause joined with the neighborhood of Tartaret to make the heat unbearable. They were by the side of old workings, a very deep abandoned gallery of Gaston-Marie, where ten years earlier an explosion of firedamp had set alight the seam, and it was still burning behind the clay wall which had been built there and was kept constantly repaired in order to limit the disaster. Deprived of air, the fire ought to have become extinct, but no doubt unknown currents kept it alive; it had gone on for ten years and heated the clay wall like the bricks of an oven, so that those who passed felt half roasted. It was along this wall, for a length of more than a hundred meters, that the haulage was carried on, in a temperature of sixty degrees.

After two journeys Catherine again felt stifled. Fortunately the passage was large and convenient in this Désirée seam, one of the thickest in the district. The bed was one meter ninety in height, and the men could work standing. But they would rather have worked with twisted necks and a little fresh air.

"Hallo, there! Are you asleep?" said Chaval again roughly, as soon as he no longer heard Catherine moving. "How the devil did I come to get such a jade? Will you just fill your tram and push?"

She was at the bottom of the cutting, leaning on her shovel; she was feeling ill and she looked at them all with a foolish air, without obeying. She scarcely saw them by the reddish gleam of the lamps, entirely naked like animals, so black, so encrusted in sweat and coal, that their nakedness did not frighten her. It was a confused task, the bending of apelike backs, an infernal vision of reddish limbs, spending their strength amid deep blows and groans. But they could see her better, no doubt, for the picks left off hammering, and they joked her about taking off her trousers.

"Eh! You'll catch cold; look out!"

"It's because she's got such fine legs! I say, Chaval, there are enough for two."

"Oh, we must see. Lift up! Higher! Higher!" Then Chaval, without growing angry at these jokes, turned onto her.

"That's it, by God! Ah, she likes dirty jokes. She'd stay there to listen till tomorrow."

Catherine had painfully decided to fill her tram, then she pushed it. The gallery was too wide for her to buttress herself to the timber on both sides; her naked feet were twisted in the rails where she sought a point of support, while she slowly moved on, her arms stiffened in front and her back breaking. As soon as she came up to the clay wall the fiery torture again began, and the sweat fell from her whole body in enormous drops, as from a storm cloud. She had scarcely got a third of the way before she streamed, blinded, soiled also by the black mud. Her narrow chemise, as though dipped in ink, was sticking to her skin and rising up to her waist with the movement of her thighs; it hurt her so that she had once more to stop her task.

What was the matter with her then today? Never before had she felt as if there were wool in her bones. It must be the bad air. The ventilation did not reach to the bottom of this distant passage. One breathed there all sorts of vapors which came out of the coal with the low bubbling sound of a spring,

so abundantly sometimes that the lamps would not burn, to say nothing of firedamp, which nobody noticed, for from one week's end to the other the men were always breathing it into their noses throughout the seam. She knew that bad air well; dead air, the miners called it; it was below the heavy asphyxiating gases, above the light gases which catch fire and blow up all the stalls of a pit, with hundreds of men, in a single burst of thunder. From her childhood she had swallowed so much that she was surprised she bore it so badly, with buzzing ears and burning throat.

Unable to go farther, she felt the need of taking off her chemise. It was beginning to torture her, this garment of which the least folds cut and burned her. She resisted the longing and tried to push again but was forced to stand upright. Then quickly, saying to herself that she would cover herself at the relay, she took off everything, the cord and the chemise, so feverishly that she would have torn off her skin if she could. And now, naked and pitiful, brought down to the level of the female animal seeking its living in the mire of the streets, covered with soot and mud up to the belly, she labored on like a cab hack. On all fours she pushed onward.

But despair came; it gave her no relief to be naked. What more could she take off? The buzzing in her ears deafened her; she seemed to feel a vice pressing in her temples. She fell on her knees. The lamp, wedged into the coal in the tram, seemed to her to be going out. The intention to turn up the wick alone survived in the midst of her confused ideas. Twice she tried to examine it, and both times when she placed it before her on the earth she saw it turn pale, as though it also lacked breath. Suddenly the lamp went out. Then everything whirled around her in the darkness; a millstone turned in her head; her heart grew weak and left off beating, numbed in its turn by the immense weariness which was putting her limbs to sleep. She had fallen back in anguish amid the asphyxiating air close to the ground.

"By God! I believe she's lazing again," growled Chaval's voice.

He listened from the top of the cutting and could hear no sound of wheels.

"Eh, Catherine, you damned worm!"

His voice was lost afar in the black gallery, and not a breath replied.

"I'll come and make you move, I will!"

Nothing stirred; there was only the same silence, as of death. He came down furiously, rushing along with his lamp so violently that he nearly fell over the putter's body which barred the way. He looked at her in stupefaction. What was the matter then? Was it humbug, a pretense of going to sleep? But the lamp which he had lowered to light up her face threatened to go out. He lifted it and lowered it afresh and at last understood: it must be a gust of bad air. His violence disappeared; the devotion of the miner in face of a comrade's peril was awakening within him. He shouted for her chemise to be brought and seized the naked and unconscious girl in his arms, holding her as high as possible. When their garments had been thrown over their shoulders he set out running, supporting his burden with one hand and carrying the two lamps with the other. The deep galleries unrolled before him as he rushed along, turning to the right, then to the left, seeking life in the frozen

air of the plain which blew down the air shaft. At last the sound of a spring stopped him, the rustling of water flowing through the rock. He was at a square in the great haulage gallery which formerly led to Gaston-Marie. The air here blew in like a tempest and was so fresh that a shudder went through him as he seated himself on the earth against the props; his mistress was still unconscious, with closed eyes.

"Catherine, come now, by God, no humbug. Hold yourself up a bit while I dip this in the water."

He was frightened to find her so limp. However, he was able to dip her chemise in the spring and to bathe her face with it. She was like a corpse, already buried at the bottom of the earth, with her slender girlish body which seemed to be still hesitating before swelling to the form of puberty. Then a shudder ran over her childish breast, over the belly and the thighs of the poor little creature deflowered before her time. She opened her eyes and stammered:

"I'm cold."

"Ah, that's better now!" cried Chaval, relieved.

He dressed her, slipped on the chemise easily but swore over the difficulty he had in getting on the trousers, for she could not help much. She remained dazed, not understanding where she was or why she was naked. When she remembered she was ashamed. How had she dared to take everything off! And she questioned him: had she been seen so, without even a handkerchief around her waist to cover her? He joked and made up stories, saying that he had just brought her there in the midst of all the mates standing in a row. What an idea, to have taken his advice and exhibited her bum! Afterward he declared that the mates could not even know whether it was round or square; he had rushed along so swiftly.

"The deuce, but I'm dying of cold," he said, dressing himself in turn.

Never had she seen him so kind. Usually for one good word that he said to her she received at once two bullying ones. It would have been so pleasant to live in agreement; a feeling of tenderness went through her in the languor of her fatigue. She smiled at him and murmured:

"Kiss me."

He embraced her and lay down beside her, waiting till she was able to walk. "You know," she said again, "you were wrong to shout at me over there, for I couldn't do more, true! Even in the cutting you're not so hot; if you only knew how it roasts you at the bottom of the passage!"

"Sure enough," he replied, "it would be better under the trees. You feel bad in that stall, I'm afraid, my poor girl."

She was so touched at hearing him agree with her that she tried to be brave.

"Oh, it's a bad place. Then today the air is poisoned. But you shall see soon if I'm a worm. When one has to work one works; isn't it true? I'd die rather than stop."

There was silence. He held her with one arm round her waist, pressing her against his breast to keep her from harm. Although she already felt strong enough to go back to the stall she forgot everything in her delight.

"Only," she went on in a very low voice, "I should like it so much if you were kinder. Yes, it is so good when we love each other a little."

And she began to cry softly.

"But I do love you," he cried, "for I've taken you with me."

She only replied by shaking her head. There are often men who take women just in order to have them, caring mighty little about their happiness. Her tears flowed more hotly; it made her despair now to think of the happy life she would have led if she had chanced to fall to another lad, whose arm she would always have felt thus round her waist. Another? And the vague image of that other arose from the depth of her emotion. But it was done with; she only desired now to live to the end with this one if he would not hustle her about too much.

"Then," she said, "try to be like this sometimes."

Sobs cut short her words, and he embraced her again.

"You're stupid! There, I swear to be kind. I'm not worse than anyone else—go on!"

She looked at him and began to smile through her tears. Perhaps he was right; one never met women who were happy. Then although she distrusted his oath, she gave herself up to the joy of seeing him affectionate. Good God, if only that could last! They had both embraced again, and as they were pressing each other in a long clasp they heard steps, which made them get up. Three mates who had seen them pass had come up to know how she was.

They set out together. It was nearly ten o'clock, and they took their lunch into a cool corner before going back to sweat at the bottom of the cutting. They were finishing the double slice of bread and butter, their brick, and were about to drink the coffee from their tin when they were disturbed by a noise coming from stalls in the distance. What then? Was it another accident? They got up and ran. Pikemen, putters, trammers, crossed them at every step; no one knew anything; all were shouting that it must be some great misfortune. Gradually the whole mine was in terror; frightened shadows emerged from the galleries; lanterns danced and flew away in the darkness. Where was it? Why could no one say?

All at once a captain passed, shouting:

"They are cutting the cables! They are cutting the cables!"

Then the panic increased. It was a furious gallop through the gloomy passages. Their heads were confused. Why cut the cables? And who was cutting them when the men were below? It seemed monstrous.

But the voice of another captain was heard and then lost:

"The Montsou men are cutting the cables! Let everyone go up!"

When he had understood Chaval stopped Catherine short. The idea that he would meet the Montsou men up above, should he get out, paralyzed his legs. It had come then, that band which he thought had got into the hands of the police. For a moment he thought of retracing his path and ascending through Gaston-Marie, but that was no longer possible. He swore, hesitating, hiding his fear, repeating that it was stupid to run like that. They would not, perhaps, leave them at the bottom.

The captain's voice echoed anew, now approaching them:

"Let everyone go up! To the ladders! To the ladders!"

And Chaval was carried away with his mates. He pushed Catherine and accused her of not running fast enough. Did she want then to remain in the pit to die of hunger? For those Montsou brigands were capable of breaking the ladders without waiting for people to come up. This abominable suggestion ended by driving them wild. Along the galleries there was only a furious rush, helter-skelter, a race of madmen, each striving to arrive first and mount before the others. Some men shouted that the ladders were broken and that no one could get out. And then in frightened groups they began to reach the pit eye, where they were all engulfed. They threw themselves toward the shaft; they crushed through the narrow door to the ladder passage, while an old groom, who had prudently led back the horses to the stable, looked at them with an air of contemptuous indifference, accustomed to spend nights in the pit and certain that he could eventually be drawn out of it.

"By God, will you climb up in front of me?" said Chaval to Catherine. "At least I can hold you if you fall."

Out of breath and suffocated by this race of three kilometers which had once more bathed her in sweat, she gave herself up, without understanding, to the eddies of the crowd. Then he pulled her by the arm, almost breaking it, and she cried with pain, her tears bursting out. Already he was forgetting his oath; never would she be happy.

"Go on then!" he roared.

But he frightened her too much. If she went first he would bully her the whole time. So she resisted, while the wild flood of their comrades pushed them to one side. The water that filtered from the shaft was falling in great drops, and the floor of the pit eye, shaken by this tramping, was trembling over the sump, the muddy cesspool ten meters deep. At Jean-Bart, two years earlier, a terrible accident had happened just here; the breaking of a cable had precipitated the cage to the bottom of the sump, in which two men had been drowned. And they all thought of this; everyone would be left down there if they all crowded onto the planks.

"Confounded dunderhead!" shouted Chaval. "Die then; I shall be rid of you!"

He climbed up and she followed.

From the bottom to daylight there were a hundred and two ladders, about seven meters in length, each placed on a narrow landing which occupied the breadth of the passage and in which a square hole scarcely allowed the shoulders to pass. It was like a flat chimney, seven hundred meters in height, between the wall of the shaft and the brattice of the winding cage, a damp pipe, black and endless, in which the ladders were placed one above the other, almost straight, in regular stages. It took a strong man twenty-five minutes to climb up this giant column. The passage, however, was no longer used except in cases of accident.

Catherine at first climbed bravely. Her naked feet were used to the hard coal on the floors of the passages and did not suffer from the square rungs, cov-

ered with iron rods to prevent them from wearing away. Her hands, hardened by the haulage, grasped without fatigue the uprights that were too big for her. And it even interested her and took her out of her grief, this unforeseen ascent, this long serpent of men flowing on and hoisting themselves up three on a ladder, so that even when the head would emerge in daylight the tail would still be trailing over the sump. They were not there yet; the first could hardly have ascended a third of the shaft. No one spoke now, only their feet moved with a low sound, while the lamps, like traveling stars, spaced out from below upward, formed a continually increasing line.

Catherine heard a trammer behind her counting the ladders. It gave her the idea of counting them also. They had already mounted fifteen and were arriving at a landing place. But at that moment she collided with Chaval's legs. He swore, shouting to her to look out. Gradually the whole column stopped and became motionless. What then? Had something happened? And everyone recovered his voice to ask questions and to express fear. Their anxiety had increased since leaving the bottom; their ignorance as to what was going on above oppressed them more as they approached daylight. Someone announced that they would have to go down again, that the ladders were broken. That was the thought that preoccupied them all, the fear of finding themselves face to face with space. Another explanation came down from mouth to mouth; there had been an accident: a pikeman slipped from a rung. No one knew exactly; the shouts made it impossible to hear; were they going to bed there? At last, without any precise information being obtained, the ascent began again with the same slow, painful movement in the midst of the rolling of feet and the dancing of lamps. It must certainly be higher up that the ladders were broken.

At the thirty-second ladder, as they passed a third landing stage, Catherine felt her legs and arms grow stiff. At first she had felt a slight tingling in her skin. Now she lost the sensation of the iron and the wood beneath her feet and in her hands. A vague pain, which gradually became burning, heated her muscles. And in the dizziness which came over her she recalled her grandfather Bonnemort's stories of the days when there was no passage and little girls often used to take out the coal on their shoulders along bare ladders, so that if one of them slipped or a fragment of coal simply rolled out of a basket three or four children would fall down head first from the blow. The cramp in her limbs became unbearable; she would never reach the end.

Fresh stoppages allowed her to breathe. But the terror which was communicated every time from above dazed her still more. Above and below her, respiration became more difficult. This interminable ascent was causing giddiness, and the nausea affected her with the others. She was suffocating, intoxicated with the darkness, exasperated with the walls which crushed against her flesh and shuddering, also, with the dampness, her body perspiring beneath the great drops which fell on her. They were approaching a level where so thick a rain fell that it threatened to extinguish their lamps.

Chaval twice spoke to Catherine without obtaining any reply. What the devil was she doing down there? Had she let her tongue fall? She might just tell

him if she was all right. They had been climbing for half an hour, but so heavily that he had only reached the fifty-ninth ladder; there were still forty-three. Catherine at last stammered that she was getting on all right. He would have treated her as a worm if she had acknowledged her weariness. The iron of the rungs must have cut her feet; it seemed to her that it was sawing in up to the bone. After every grip she expected to see her hands leave the uprights; they were so pecked and stiff that she could not close her fingers, and she feared she would fall backward with torn shoulders and disjointed thighs in this continual effort. It was especially the defective slope of the ladders from which she suffered, the almost perpendicular position which obliged her to hoist herself up by the strength of her wrists, with her belly against the wood. The panting of many breaths now drowned the sound of the feet, forming an enormous moan, multiplied tenfold by the partition of the passage, arising from the depths and expiring toward the light. There was a groan; word ran along that a trammer had just cut his head open against the edge of a stair.

And Catherine went on climbing. They had passed the level. The rain had ceased; a mist made heavy the cellarlike air, poisoned with the odor of old iron and damp wood. Mechanically she continued to count in a low voice—eighty-one, eighty-two, eighty-three; still nineteen. The repetition of these figures supported her merely by their rhythmic balance; she had no further consciousness of her movements. When she lifted her eyes the lamps turned in a spiral. Her blood was flowing; she felt that she was dying; the least breath would have knocked her over. The worst was that those below were now pushing and that the entire column was rushing on, yielding to the growing anger of its fatigue, the furious need to see the sun again. The first mates had emerged; there were then no broken ladders, but the idea that they might yet be broken to prevent the last from coming up, when others were already breathing up above, nearly drove them mad. And when a new stoppage occurred oaths broke out, and all went on climbing, hustling each other, passing over each other's bodies to arrive at all costs.

Then Catherine fell. She had cried Chaval's name in despairing appeal. He did not hear; he was struggling, digging his heels into a comrade's ribs to get before him. And she was rolled down and trampled over. As she fainted she dreamed. It seemed to her that she was one of the little putter girls of old days and that a fragment of coal, fallen from the basket above her, had thrown her to the bottom of the shaft, like a sparrow struck by a flint. Five ladders only remained to climb. It had taken nearly an hour. She never knew how she reached daylight, carried up on people's shoulders, supported by the throttling narrowness of the passage. Suddenly she found herself in the dazzling sunlight, in the midst of a yelling crowd who were hooting her.

CHAPTER III

FROM EARLY MORNING, before daylight, a tremor had agitated the settlements, and that tremor was now swelling through the roads and over the whole coun-

try. But the departure had not taken place as arranged, for the news had spread that cavalry and police were scouring the plain. It was said that they had arrived from Douai during the night, and Rasseneur was accused of having betrayed his mates by warning M. Hennebeau; a putter even swore that she had seen the servant taking a dispatch to the telegraph office. The miners clenched their fists and watched the soldiers from behind their shutters by the pale light of the early morning.

Toward half-past seven, as the sun was rising, another rumor circulated, reassuring the impatient. It was a false alarm, a simple military promenade, which the general occasionally ordered since the strike had broken out, at the desire of the prefect of Lille. The strikers detested this official; they reproached him with deceiving them by the promise of a conciliatory intervention, which was limited to a march of troops into Montsou every week to overawe them. So when the cavalry and police quietly took the road back to Marchiennes, after contenting themselves with deafening the settlements by the stamping of their horses over the hard earth, the miners jeered at this innocent prefect and his soldiers who turned on their heels when things were beginning to get hot. Up till nine o'clock they stood peacefully about in good humor before their houses, following with their eyes up the streets the compliant backs of the last gendarmes. In the depths of their large beds the good people of Montsou were still sleeping, with their heads among the feathers. At the manager's house Mine Hennebeau had just been seen setting out in the carriage, leaving M. Hennebeau at work, no doubt, for the closed and silent villa seemed dead. Not one of the pits had any military guard; it was a fatal lack of foresight in the hour of danger, the natural stupidity which accompanies catastrophes, the fault which a government commits whenever there is need of precise knowledge of the facts. And nine o'clock was striking when the colliers at last took the Vandame road to repair to the rendezvous decided on the day before in the forest.

Etienne had very quickly perceived that he would certainly not find over at Jean-Bart the three thousand comrades on whom he was counting. Many believed that the demonstration was put off, and the worst was that two or three bands, already on the way, would compromise the cause if he did not at all costs put himself at their head. Almost a hundred, who had set out before daylight, were taking refuge beneath the forest beeches, waiting for the others. Souvarine, whom the young man went up to consult, shrugged his shoulders—ten resolute fellows could do more work than a crowd—and he turned back to the open book before him, refusing to join in. The thing threatened to turn into sentiment when it would have been enough to adopt the simple method of burning Montsou. As Etienne left the house he saw Rasseneur seated before the metal stove and looking very pale, while his wife, in her everlasting black dress, was abusing him in polite and cutting terms.

Maheu was of the opinion that they ought to keep their promise. A rendezvous like this was sacred. However, the night had calmed their fever; he was now fearing misfortune and he explained that it was their duty to go over there to maintain their mates in the right path. Maheude approved with a nod. Etienne repeated complacently that it was necessary to adopt revolutionary

methods, without attempting any person's life. Before setting out he refused his share of a loaf that had been given him the evening before, together with a bottle of gin, but he drank three little glasses, one after the other, saying that he wanted to keep out the cold; he even carried away a tinful. Alzire would look after the children. Old Bonnemort, whose legs were suffering from yesterday's walk, remained in bed.

They did not go away together from motives of prudence. Jeanlin had disappeared long ago. Maheu and Maheude went off on the side sloping toward Montsou, while Etienne turned toward the forest, where he proposed to join his mates. On the way he caught up with a band of women, among whom he recognized Mother Brûlé and the Levaque woman; as they walked they were eating chestnuts which Mouquette had brought; they swallowed the skins so as to feel more in their stomachs. But in the forest he found no one; the men were already at Jean-Bart. He took the same course and arrived at the pit at the moment when Levaque and some hundred others were penetrating into the square. Miners were coming up from every direction—the men by the main road, the women by the fields—all at random, without leaders, without weapons, flowing naturally thither like water which runs down a slope. Etienne perceived Jeanlin, who had climbed up the footbridge, installed as though at a theater. He ran faster and entered among the first. There were scarcely three hundred of them.

There was some hesitation when Deneulin showed himself at the top of the staircase which led to the receiving room.

"What do you want?" he asked in a loud voice.

After having watched the disappearance of the carriage, from which his daughters were still laughing toward him, he had returned to the pit, overtaken by a vague anxiety. Everything, however, was found in good order. The men had gone down; the cage was working, and he became reassured again and was talking to the head captain when the approach of the strikers was announced to him. He had placed himself at a window of the screening shed, and in the face of this increasing flood which filled the square he at once felt his impotence. How could he defend these buildings, open on every side? He could scarcely group some twenty of his workmen round himself. He was lost.

"What do you want?" he repeated, pale with repressed anger, making an effort to accept his disaster courageously.

There were pushes and growls amid the crowd. Etienne at last came forward, saying:

"We do not come to injure you, sir, but work must cease everywhere."

Deneulin frankly treated him as an idiot.

"Do you think you will benefit me if you stop work at my place? You might just as well fire a gun off into my back. Yes, my men are below, and they shall not come up unless you mean to murder me first!"

These rough words raised a clamor. Maheu had to hold back Levaque, who was pushing forward in a threatening manner, while Etienne, always acting in a parliamentary fashion, tried to convince Deneulin of the lawfulness of their revolutionary conduct. But the latter replied by the right to work. Besides,

he refused to discuss such folly; he meant to be master in his own place. His only regret was that he had not four gendarmes here to sweep away this mob.

"To be sure, it is my fault; I deserve what has happened to me. With fellows of your sort force is the only argument. The government thinks to buy you by concessions. You will throw it down, that's all, when it has given you weapons."

Etienne was quivering but still held himself in. He lowered his voice.

"I beg you, sir, give the order for your men to come up. I cannot answer for my mates. You may avoid a disaster."

"No! Be good enough to let me alone! Do I know you? You do not belong to my works; you have no quarrel with me. It is only brigands who thus scour the country to pillage houses."

Loud vociferations now drowned his voice; the women especially abused him. But he continued to hold his own, experiencing a certain relief in this frankness with which he expressed his disciplinarian's nature. Since he was ruined in any case, he thought platitudes a useless cowardice. But their numbers went on increasing; nearly five hundred were pushing toward the door, and he might have been torn to pieces if his head captain had not pulled him violently back.

"If you please, sir! There will be a massacre. What is the good of letting men be killed for nothing?"

He struggled and protested in one last cry thrown at the crowd:

"You set of brigands, you will know what when we are strongest again!"

They led him away; the hustling of the crowd had thrown the first ranks against the staircase so that the rail was twisted. It was the women who pushed and screamed and urged on the men. The door yielded at once; it was a door without a lock, simply closed by a latch. But the staircase was too narrow for the pushing crowd, which would have taken long to get in if the rear of the besiegers had not gone off to enter by other openings. Then they poured in on all sides—by the shed, the screening place, the boiler buildings. In less than five minutes the whole pit belonged to them; they swarmed at every story in the midst of furious gestures and cries, carried away by their victory over this master who resisted.

Maheu, in terror, had rushed forward among the first, saying to Etienne:

"They must not kill him!"

The latter was already running; then when Etienne understood that Deneulin had barricaded himself in the captain's room he replied:

"Well, would it be our fault? Such a madman!"

He was feeling anxious, however, being still too calm to yield to this outburst of anger. His pride of leadership also suffered on seeing the band escape from his authority and become enraged, going beyond the cold execution of the will of the people, such as he had anticipated. In vain he called for coolness; he shouted that they must not put right on their enemies' side by acts of useless destruction.

"To the boilers!" shouted Mother Brûlé. "Put out the fires!"

Levaque, who had found a file, was brandishing it like a dagger, dominating the tumult with a terrible cry:

"Cut the cables! Cut the cables!"

Soon they all repeated this; only Etienne and Maheu continued to protest, dazed and talking in the tumult without obtaining silence. At last the former was able to say:

"But there are men below, mates!"

The noise redoubled, and voices arose from all sides:

"So much the worse! . . . Ought not to go down! . . . Serve the traitors right! . . . Yes, yes, let them stay there! . . . And then, they have the ladders!"

Then when this idea of the ladders had made them still more obstinate Etienne saw that he would have to yield. For fear of a greater disaster he hastened toward the engine, wishing at all events to bring the cages up, so that the cables, being cut above the shaft, should not smash them by falling down with their enormous weight. The engineman had disappeared as well as the few daylight workers, and he took hold of the starting lever, manipulating it while Levaque and two others climbed up the metal scaffold which supported the pulleys. The cages were hardly fixed on the keeps when the strident sound was heard of the file biting into the steel. There was deep silence, and this noise seemed to fill the whole pit; all raised their heads, looking and listening, seized by emotion. In the first rank Maheu felt a fierce joy possess him, as if the teeth of the file would deliver them from misfortune by eating into the cable of one of these dens of wretchedness into which they would never descend again.

But Mother Brûlé had disappeared by the shed stairs, still shouting:

"The fires must be put out! To the boilers! To the boilers!"

Some women followed her. Maheude hastened to prevent them from smashing everything, just as her husband had tried to reason with the men. She was the calmest of them; one could demand one's rights without making a mess in people's places. When she entered the boiler building the women were already chasing away the two stokers, and the Brûlé, armed with a large shovel and crouching down before one of the stoves, was violently emptying it, throwing the red-hot coke onto the brick floor, where it continued to burn with black smoke. There were ten stoves for the five boilers. Soon the women warmed to the work, the Levaque manipulating her shovel with both hands, Mouquette raising her clothes up to her thighs so as not to catch fire, all looking red in the reflection of the flames, sweating and disheveled in this witch's kitchen. The piles of coal increased, and the burning heat cracked the ceiling of the vast hall.

"Enough now!" cried Maheude. "The storeroom is afire."

"So much the better," replied Mother Brûlé. "That will do the work. Ah, by God, haven't I said that I would pay them out for the death of my man?"

At this moment Jeanlin's shrill voice was heard:

"Look out! I'll put it out, I will! I'll let it all off!"

He had come in among the first and had kicked his legs about among the crowd, delighted at the fray and seeking out what mischief he could do; the idea had occurred to him to turn on the discharge taps to let off steam.

The jets came out with the violence of volleys; the five boilers were emptied

with the sound of a tempest, whistling in such a roar of thunder that one's ears seemed to bleed. Everything had disappeared in the midst of the vapor; the hot coal grew pale, and the women were nothing more than shadows with broken gestures. The child alone appeared, mounted on the gallery, behind the whirlwinds of white steam, filled with delight and with wide-grinning mouth in the joy of unchaining this hurricane.

This lasted nearly a quarter of an hour. A few buckets of water had been thrown over the heaps to complete their extinction; all danger of a fire had gone by, but the anger of the crowd had not subsided; on the contrary, it had been whipped up. The men went down with hammers; even the women armed themselves with iron bars, and they talked of smashing boilers, of breaking engines and of demolishing the mine.

Etienne, forewarned, hastened to come up with Maheu. He himself was becoming intoxicated and carried away by this hot fever of revenge. He struggled, however, and entreated them to be calm now that, with cut cables, extinguished fires and empty boilers, work was impossible. He was not always listened to and was again about to be carried away by the crowd, when hoots arose outside at a little low door where the ladder passage emerged.

"Down with the traitors! Oh, the dirty chops of the cowards! Down with them! Down with them!"

The men were beginning to come up from below. The first arrivals, blinded by the daylight, stood there with quivering eyelids. Then they moved away, trying to gain the road and flee.

"Down with the cowards! Down with the traitors!"

The whole band of strikers had run up. In less than three minutes there was not a man left in the buildings; the five hundred Montsou men were ranged in two rows, and the Vandane men, who had had the treachery to go down, were forced to pass between this double hedge. And as every fresh miner appeared at the door of the passage, covered with the black mud of work and with garments in rags, the hooting redoubled, and ferocious jokes arose. Oh, look at that one—three inches of legs and then his arse! And this one with his nose eaten by those Volcan girls! And this other, with eyes ejecting enough wax to furnish ten cathedrals! And this other, the tall fellow without a rump and as long as Lent! An enormous putter woman, who rolled out with her breast to her belly and her belly to her backside, raised a furious laugh. They wanted to handle them; the joking increased and was turning to cruelty; blows would soon have rained, while the row of poor devils came out, shivering and silent beneath the abuse, with sidelong looks in expectation of blows, glad when they could at last rush away out of the mine.

"Hallo! How many are there in there?" asked Etienne.

He was astonished to see them still coming out and irritated at the idea that it was not a mere handful of workers, terrorized by the captains. They had lied to him then in the forest; nearly all Jean-Bart had gone down. But a cry escaped from him, and he rushed forward when he saw Chaval standing on the threshold.

"By God! Is this the rendezvous you called us to?"

Impercations broke out, and there was a movement of the crowd toward the traitor. What! He had sworn with them the day before, and now they found him down below with the others! Was he then making fools of people?

"Off with him! To the shaft! To the shaft!"

Chaval, white with fear, stammered and tried to explain. But Etienne cut him short, carried out of himself and sharing the fury of the band.

"You wanted to be in it and you shall be in it. Come on! Take your damned snout along!"

Another clamor covered his voice. Catherine, in her turn, had just appeared, dazzled by the bright sunlight and frightened at falling into the midst of these savages. She was panting, with legs aching from the hundred and two ladders and with bleeding palms, when Maheude, seeing her, rushed forward with her hand up.

"Ah, slut! You too! When your mother is dying of hunger you betray her for your bully!"

Maheu held back her arm and stopped the blow. But he shook his daughter; he was enraged, like his wife; he threw up her conduct in her face, and both lost their heads, shouting louder than their mates.

The sight of Catherine had completed Etienne's exasperation.

He repeated:

"On we go to the other pits, and you come with us, you dirty devil!"

Chaval had scarcely time to get his sabots from the shed and to throw his woolen jacket over his frozen shoulders. They all dragged him on, forcing him to run in the midst of them. Catherine was dazed and also put on her sabots, buttoning at her neck her man's old jacket, with which she kept off the cold, and she ran behind her lover; she would not leave him, for surely they were going to murder him.

Then in two minutes Jean-Bart was emptied. Jeanlin had found a horn and was blowing it, producing hoarse sounds, as though he were gathering oxen together. The women—Mother Brûlé, the Levaque and Mouquette—raised their skirts to run, while Levaque, with an ax in his hand, manipulated it like a drum major's stick. Other men continued to arrive; they were nearly a thousand, without order, again flowing onto the road like a torrent let loose. The gates were too narrow, and the palings were broken down.

"To the pits! Down with the traitors! No more work!"

And Jean-Bart fell suddenly into a great silence. Not a man was left; not a breath was heard. Deneulin came out of the captain's room and, quite alone, with a gesture forbidding anyone to follow him, he went over the pit. He was pale and very calm.

At first he stopped before the shaft, lifting his eyes to look at the cut cables; the steel ends hung useless; the bite of the file had left a living scar, a fresh wound which gleamed in the black grease. Afterward he went up to the engine and looked at the crank, which was motionless, like the joint of a colossal limb struck by paralysis. He touched the metal, which had already cooled, and the cold made him shudder as though he had touched a corpse. Then he went down to the boiler room, walked slowly before the extinguished stoves, yawn-

ing and inundated, and struck his foot against the boilers, which sounded hollow. Come, it was quite finished; his ruin was complete. Even if he mended the cables and lit the fires, where would he find men? Another fortnight's strike and he would be bankrupt. And in this certainty of disaster he no longer felt any hatred of the Montsou brigands; he felt that all had a complicity in it, that it was a general agelong fault. They were brutes, no doubt, but brutes who could not read and who were dying of hunger.

CHAPTER IV

AND THE TROOP went off over the flat plain, white with frost beneath the pale winter sun, and overflowed the path as they passed through the beetroot fields.

From the Fourche-aux-Bœufs, Etienne had assumed command. He cried his orders while the crowd moved on and organized the march. Jeanlin galloped at the head, performing a barbarous music on his horn. Then the women came in the first ranks, some of them armed with sticks: Maheude, with wild eyes, seemed to be seeking afar for the promised city of justice, Mother Brûlé, the Levaque woman, Mouquette, striding along beneath their rags, like soldiers setting out for the seat of war. If they had any encounters we should see if the police dared to strike women. And the men followed in a confused flock with a roar that grew larger and larger, bristling with iron bars and dominated by Levaque's single ax, with its blade glistening in the sun. Etienne, in the middle, kept Chaval in sight, forcing him to walk before him, while Maheu, behind, gloomily kept an eye on Catherine, the only woman among these men, obstinately trotting near her lover for fear that he would be hurt. Bare heads were disheveled in the air; only the clank of sabots could be heard, like the movement of released cattle, carried away by Jeanlin's wild trumpeting.

But suddenly a new cry arose:

"Bread! Bread! Bread!"

It was midday; the hunger of six weeks on strike was awaking in these empty stomachs, whipped up by this race across the fields. The few crusts of the morning and Mouquette's chestnuts had long been forgotten; their stomachs were crying out, and this suffering was added to their fury against the traitors.

"To the pits! No more work! Bread!"

Etienne, who had refused to eat his share at the settlement, felt an unbearable tearing sensation in his chest. He made no complaint but mechanically took his tin from time to time and swallowed a gulp of gin, shaking so much that he thought he needed it to carry him to the end. His cheeks were heated and his eyes inflamed. He kept his head, however, and still wished to avoid needless destruction.

As they arrived at the Joiselle road a Vandame pikeman, who had joined the band for revenge on his master, impelled the men toward the right, shouting:

"To Gaston-Marie! Must stop the pump! Let the water ruin Jean-Bart!"

The mob was already turning in spite of the protests of Etienne, who begged them to let the pumping continue. What was the good of destroying the gal-

leries? It offended his workman's heart, in spite of his resentment. Maheu also thought it unjust to take revenge on a machine. But the pikeman still shouted his cry of vengeance, and Etienne had to cry still louder:

"To Mirou! There are traitors down there! To Mirou! To Mirou!"

With a gesture he had turned the crowd toward the left road, while Jeanlin, going ahead, was blowing louder than ever. An eddy was produced in the crowd; this time Gaston-Marie was saved.

And the four kilometers which separated them from Mirou were traversed in half an hour, almost at running pace, across the interminable plain. The canal on this side cut it with a long icy ribbon. The leafless trees on the banks, changed by the frost into giant candelabra, alone broke this pale uniformity, prolonged and lost in the sky at the horizon, as in a sea. An undulation of the ground hid Montsou and Marchiennes; there was nothing but bare immensity.

They reached the pit and found a captain standing on a footbridge at the screening shed to receive them. They all well knew Father Quandieu, the *doyen* of the Montsou captains, an old man whose skin and hair were quite white and who was in his seventies, a miracle of fine health in the mines.

"What have you come after here, you pack of meddlers?" he shouted.

The band stopped. It was no longer a master; it was a mate, and a certain respect held them back before this old workman.

"There are men down below," said Etienne. "Make them come up."

"Yes, there are men there," said Father Quandieu, "some six dozen; the others were afraid of you evil beggars! But I warn you that not one comes up, or you will have to deal with me!"

Exclamations arose; the men pushed; the women advanced. Quickly coming down from the footbridge, the captain now barred the door.

Then Maheu tried to interfere.

"It is our right, old man. How can we make the strike general if we don't force all the mates to be on our side?"

The old man was silent a moment. Evidently his ignorance on the subject of coalition equaled the pikeman's. At last he replied:

"It may be your right; I don't say. But I only know my orders. I am alone here; the men are down till three, and they shall stay there till three."

The last words were lost in hooting. Fists were threateningly advanced; the women deafened him, and their hot breath blew in his face. But he still held out, his head erect and his beard and hair white as snow; his courage had so swollen his voice that he could be heard distinctly over the tumult.

"By God, you shall not pass! As true as the sun shines, I would rather die than let you touch the cables. Don't push any more, or I'm damned if I don't fling myself down the shaft before you!"

The crowd drew back, shuddering and impressed. He went on:

"Where is the beast who does not understand that? I am only a workman like you others. I have been told to guard here, and I'm guarding."

That was as far as Father Quandieu's intelligence went, stiffened by his obstinacy of military duty, his narrow skull and eyes dimmed by the black

melancholy of half a century spent underground. The men looked at him, moved, feeling within them an echo of what he said, this military obedience, the sense of fraternity and resignation in danger. He saw that they were hesitating still and repeated:

"I'm damned if I don't fling myself down the shaft before you!"

A great recoil carried away the mob. They all turned and in the rush took the right-hand road, which stretched far away through the fields. Again cries arose:

"To Madeleine! To Crèveœur! No more work! Bread! Bread!"

But in the center, as they went on, there was hustling. It was Chaval, they said, who was trying to take advantage of an opportunity to escape. Etienne had seized him by the arm, threatening to do for him if he was planning some treachery. And the other struggled and protested furiously:

"What's all this for? Isn't a man free? I've been freezing the last hour. I want to clean myself. Let me go!"

He was, in fact, suffering from the coal glued to his skin by sweat, and his woolen garment was no protection.

"On you go, or we'll clean you," replied Etienne. "Don't expect to get your life at a bargain."

They were still running, and he turned toward Catherine, who was keeping up well. It annoyed him to feel her so near him, so miserable, shivering beneath her man's old jacket and her muddy trousers. She must be nearly dead of fatigue; she was running, all the same.

"You can go off, you can," he said at last.

Catherine seemed not to hear. Her eyes on meeting Etienne's only flamed with reproach for a moment. She would not stop. Why did he want her to leave her man? Chaval was not at all kind, it was true; he would even beat her sometimes. But he was her man, the one who had had her first, and it enraged her that they should throw themselves on him—more than a thousand of them. She would have defended him without any tenderness at all, out of pride.

"Off you go!" repeated Maheu violently.

Her father's order slackened her course for a moment. She trembled, and her eyelids swelled with tears. Then in spite of her fear she came back to the same place again, still running. Then they let her be.

The mob crossed the Joiselle road, went a short distance up the Cron road and then mounted toward Cougny. On this side factory chimneys striped the flat horizon; wooden sheds, brick workshops with large dusty windows, appeared along the street. They passed one after another the low buildings of two settlements—that of the Cent-Quatre-Vingts, then that of the Soixante-Seize—and from each of them, at the sound of the horn and the clamor arising from every mouth, whole families came out—men, women and children—running to join their mates in the rear. When they came up to Madeleine there were at least fifteen hundred. The road descended in a gentle slope; the rumbling flood of strikers had to turn round the pit bank before they could spread over the mine square.

It was now not more than two o'clock. But the captains had been warned and were hastening the ascent as the band arrived. The men were all up; only some twenty remained and were now disembarking from the cage. They fled and were pursued with stones. Two were struck; another left the sleeve of his jacket behind. This man hunt saved the material, and neither the cables nor the boilers were touched. The flood was already moving away, rolling on toward the next pit.

This one, Crève-cœur, was only five hundred meters away from Madeleine. There, also, the mob arrived in the midst of the ascent. A putter girl was taken and whipped by the women with her breeches split open and her buttocks exposed before the men, who were laughing. The trammer boys had their ears boxed; the pikemen got away, their sides blue from blows and their noses bleeding. And in this growing ferocity, in this old need of revenge which was turning every head with madness, the choked cries went on, death to traitors, hatred against ill-paid work, the roaring of bellies after bread. They began to cut the cables, but the file would not bite, and the task was too long now that the fever was on them for moving onward, forever onward. At the boilers a tap was broken, while the water, thrown by bucketfuls into the stoves, made the metal gratings burst.

Outside they were talking of marching on St Thomas. This was the best-disciplined pit. The strike had not touched it; nearly seven hundred men must have gone down there. This exasperated them; they would wait for these men with sticks, ranged for battle, just to see who would get the best of it. But the rumor ran along that there were gendarmes at St Thomas, the gendarmes of the morning, whom they had made fun of. How was this known? Nobody could say. No matter! They were seized by fear and decided on Feutry-Cantel. Their giddiness carried them on; all were on the road, clanking their sabots, rushing forward. To Feutry-Cantel! To Feutry-Cantel! The cowards there were certainly four hundred in number, and they would be fun! Situated three kilometers away, this pit lay in a fold of the ground near the Scarpe. They were already climbing the slope of the Plâtrières, beyond the road to Beaugnies, when a voice—no one knew from whom—threw out the idea that the soldiers were perhaps down there at Feutry-Cantel. Then from one end to the other of the column it was repeated that the soldiers were down there. They slackened their march; panic gradually spread in the country, idle without work, which they had been scouring for hours. Why had they not come across the soldiers? This impunity troubled them, at the thought of the repression which they felt to be coming.

Without anyone knowing where it came from, a new word of command turned them toward another pit.

"To the Victoire! To the Victoire!"

Were there then neither soldiers nor police at the Victoire? Nobody knew. All seemed reassured. And turning round, they descended from the Beaumont side and cut across the fields to reach the Joiselle road. The railway line barred their passage, and they crossed it, pulling down the palings. Now they were approaching Montsou; the gradual undulation of the landscape grew less; the

sea of beetroot fields enlarged, reaching far away to the black houses at Marchiennes.

This time it was a march of five good kilometers. So strong an impulse pushed them on that they had no feeling of their terrible fatigue or of their bruised and wounded feet. The rear continued to lengthen, increased by mates enlisted on the roads and in the settlements. When they had passed the canal at the Magache bridge and appeared before the Victoire there were two thousand of them. But three o'clock had struck; the ascent was completed; not a man remained below. Their disappointment was spent in vain threats; they could only heave broken bricks at the workmen who had arrived to take their duty at the earth cutting. There was a rush, and the deserted pit belonged to them. And in their rage at not finding a traitor's face to strike they attacked things. A rankling abscess was bursting within them, a poisoned boil of slow growth. Years and years of hunger tortured them with a thirst for massacre and destruction.

Behind a shed Etienne saw some porters filling a wagon with coal.

"Will you just clear out of the bloody place?" he shouted. "Not a bit of coal goes out!"

At his orders some hundred strikers ran up, and the porters only had time to escape. Men unharnessed the horses, which were frightened and set off, struck in the haunches, while others, overturning the wagon, broke the shafts.

Levaque, with violent blows of his ax, had thrown himself on the platforms to break down the footbridges. They resisted, and it occurred to him to tear up the rails, destroying the line from one end of the square to the other. Soon the whole band set to this task. Maheu made the metal chairs leap up, armed with his iron bar which he used as a lever. During this time Mother Brûlé led away the women and invaded the lamp cabin, where their sticks covered the soil with a carnage of lamps. Maheude, carried out of herself, was laying about her as vigorously as the Levaque woman. All were soaked in oil, and Mouquette dried her hands on her skirt, laughing to find herself so dirty. Jeanlin, for a joke, had emptied a lamp down her neck. But all this revenge produced nothing to eat. Stromachs were crying out louder than ever. And the great lamentation dominated still:

"Bread! Bread! Bread!"

A former captain at the Victoire kept a stall near by. No doubt he had fled in fear, for his shed was abandoned. When the women came back and the men had finished destroying the railway, they besieged the stall, the shutters of which yielded at once. They found no bread there; there were only two pieces of raw flesh and a sack of potatoes. But in the pillage they discovered some fifty bottles of gin, which disappeared like a drop of water drunk up by the sand.

Etienne, having emptied his tin, was able to refill it. Little by little a terrible drunkenness, the drunkenness of the starved, was inflaming his eyes and showing his teeth like a wolf's teeth between his pallid lips. Suddenly he perceived that Chaval had gone off in the midst of the tumult. He swore, and men ran to seize the fugitive, who was hiding with Catherine behind the timber supply.

"Ah, you dirty swine; you are afraid of getting into trouble!" shouted Etienne. "It was you in the forest who called for a strike of the enginemen, to stop the pumps, and now you want to play us a filthy trick! Very well! By God, we will go back to Gaston-Marie. I will have you smash the pump; yes, by God, you shall smash it!"

He was drunk; he was urging his men against this pump which he had saved a few hours earlier.

"To Gaston-Marie! To Gaston-Marie!"

They all cheered and rushed on, while Chaval, seized by the shoulders, was drawn and pushed violently along, while he constantly asked to be allowed to wash.

"Will you take yourself off then?" cried Maheu to Catherine, who had also begun to run again.

This time she did not even draw back but turned her burning eyes on her father and went on running.

Once more the mob plowed through the flat plain. They were retracing their steps over the long straight paths, by the fields endlessly spread out. It was four o'clock; the sun, which approached the horizon, lengthened the shadows of this horde with their furious gestures over the frozen soil.

They avoided Montsou and farther on rejoined the Joiselle road; to spare the journey round Fourche-aux-Bœufs, they passed beneath the walls of Piolaine. The Grégoires had just gone out, having to visit a lawyer before going to dine with the Hennebeaus, where they would find Cécile. The estate seemed asleep with its avenue of deserted limes, its kitchen garden and its orchard bared by the winter. Nothing was stirring in the house, and the closed windows were dulled by the warm steam within. Out of the profound silence an impression of good-natured comfort arose, the patriarchal sensation of good beds and a good table, the wise happiness of the proprietor's existence.

Without stopping the band cast gloomy looks through the grating and at the length of protecting walls, bristling with broken bottles. The cry arose again:

"Bread! Bread! Bread!"

The dogs alone replied by barking ferociously, a pair of big Danes with rough coats, who stood with open jaws. And behind the closed blind there were only the servants, Mélanie, the cook, and Honorine, the housemaid, attracted by this cry, pale and perspiring with fear at seeing these savages go by. They fell on their knees and thought themselves killed on hearing a single stone breaking a pane of a neighboring window. It was a joke of Jeanlin's; he had manufactured a sling with a piece of cord and had just sent a little passing greeting to the Grégoires. Already he was again blowing his horn, and the band was lost in the distance, and the cry grew fainter:

"Bread! Bread! Bread!"

They arrived at Gaston-Marie in still greater numbers, more than twenty-five hundred madmen, breaking everything, sweeping away everything, with the force of a torrent which gains strength as it moves. The police had passed here an hour earlier and had gone off toward St Thomas, led astray by some

peasants; in their haste they had not even taken the precaution of leaving a few men behind to guard the pit. In less than a quarter of an hour the fires were overturned, the boilers emptied, the buildings torn down and devastated. But it was the pump which they specially threatened. It was not enough to stop it in the last expiring breath of its steam; they threw themselves on it as on a living person whose life they required.

"The first blow is yours!" repeated Etienne, putting a hammer into Chaval's hand. "Come! You have sworn with the others!"

Chaval drew back, trembling, and in the hustling the hammer fell, while other men, without waiting, murdered the pump with blows from iron bars, blows from bricks, blows from anything they could lay their hands on. Some even broke sticks over it. The nuts leaped off; the pieces of steel and copper were dislocated like torn limbs. The blow of a shovel, delivered with full force, fractured the metal body; the water escaped and emptied itself, and there was a supreme gurgle, like an agonizing death rattle.

That was the end, and the mob found themselves outside again, madly pushing on behind Etienne, who would not let Chaval go.

"Kill him! The traitor! To the shaft! To the shaft!"

The livid wretch, clinging with imbecile obstinacy to his fixed idea, continued to stammer his need of cleaning himself.

"Wait, if that bothers you," said the Levaque woman. "Here! Here's a bucket!"

There was a pond there, an infiltration of the water from the pump. It was white with a thick layer of ice, and they struck it and broke the ice, forcing him to dip his head in this cold water.

"Duck then," repeated Mother Brûlé. "By God, if you don't duck we'll shove you in. And now you shall have a drink of it; yes, yes, like a beast, with your jaws in the trough!"

He had to drink on all fours. They all laughed with cruel laughter. One woman pulled his ears; another woman threw in his face a handful of dung found fresh on the road. His old woolen jacket, in tatters, no longer held together. He was haggard, stumbling, and with struggling movements of his hips he tried to flee.

Maheu had pushed him, and Maheude was among those who grew furious, both of them satisfying their old spite; even Mouquette, who generally remained such good friends with her old lovers, was wild with this one, treating him as good-for-nothing and talking of taking his breeches down to see if he were still a man.

Etienne made her hold her tongue.

"That's enough. There's no need for all to set to it. If you like, you, we will just settle it together."

His fists closed and his eyes were lit up with homicidal fury; his intoxication was turning into the desire to kill.

"Are you ready? One of us must stay here. Give him a knife; I've got mine."

Catherine, exhausted and terrified, gazed at him. She remembered his confidences, his desire to devour a man when he had drunk, poisoned after the

third glass, to such an extent had his drunkards of parents put this beastliness into his body. Suddenly she leaped forward, struck him with both her woman's hands and choking with indignation, shouted into his face:

"Coward! Coward! Coward! Isn't it enough then, all these abominations? You want to kill him now that he can't stand upright any longer!"

She turned toward her father and her mother; she turned toward the others.

"You are cowards! Cowards! Kill me then with him! I will tear your eyes out, I will, if you touch him again. Oh, the cowards!"

And she planted herself before her man to defend him, forgetting the blows, forgetting the life of misery, lifted up by the idea that she belonged to him since he had taken her and that it was a shame for her when they so crushed him.

Etienne had grown pale beneath this girl's blows. At first he had been about to knock her down, then after having wiped his face with the movement of a man who is recovering from intoxication, he said to Chaval in the midst of deep silence:

"She is right; that's enough. Off you go."

Immediately Chaval was away, and Catherine galloped behind him. The crowd gazed at as they disappeared round a corner of the road, but Maheude muttered:

"You were wrong; ought to have kept him. He is sure to be after some treachery."

But the mob began to march on again. Five o'clock was about to strike. The sun, as red as a furnace on the edge of the horizon, seemed to set fire to the whole plain. A peddler who was passing informed them that the military were descending from the Crèveœur side. Then they turned. An order ran:

"To Montsou! To the manager! Bread! Bread! Bread!"

CHAPTER V

M. HENNEBEAU had placed himself in front of his study window to watch the departure of the carriage which was taking away his wife to lunch at Marchiennes. His eyes followed Négrel for a moment as he trotted beside the carriage door. Then he quietly returned and seated himself at his desk. When neither his wife nor his nephew animated the place with their presence the house seemed empty. On this day the coachman was driving his wife; Rose, the new housemaid, had leave to go out till five o'clock; there only remained Hippolyte, the *valet de chambre*, trailing about the rooms in slippers, and the cook, who had been occupied since dawn in struggling with her saucepans, entirely absorbed in the dinner which was to be given in the evening. So M. Hennebeau promised himself a day of serious work in this deep calm of the deserted house.

Toward nine o'clock, although he had received orders to send everyone away, Hippolyte took the liberty of announcing Dansaert, who was bringing news. The manager then heard for the first time of the meeting in the forest the evening before; the details were very precise, and he listened while think-

ing of the intrigue with Pierronne, so well known that two or three anonymous letters every week denounced the licentiousness of the head captain. Evidently the husband had talked, and no doubt the wife had too. He even took advantage of the occasion; he let the head captain know that he was aware of everything, contenting himself with recommending prudence for fear of a scandal. Startled by these reproaches in the midst of his report, Dansaert denied, stammered excuses, while his great nose confessed the crime by its sudden redness. He did not insist, however, glad to get off so easily, for as a rule the manager displayed the implacable severity of the virtuous man whenever an employee allowed himself the indulgence of a pretty girl in the pit. The conversation continued concerning the strike: that meeting in the forest was only the swagger of blusterers; nothing seriously threatened. In any case, the settlements would surely not stir for some days, beneath the impression of respectful fear which must have been produced by the military promenade of the morning.

When H. Hennebeau was alone again he was, however, on the point of sending a telegram to the prefect. Only the fear of uselessly showing a sign of anxiety held him back. Already he could not forgive himself his lack of insight in saying everywhere and even writing to the directors that the strike would last at most a fortnight. It had been going on and on for nearly two months, to his great surprise, and he was in despair over it; he felt himself every day diminished and compromised and was forced to imagine some brilliant achievement which would bring him back into favor with the directors. He had just asked them for orders in the case of a skirmish. There was delay over the reply, and he was expecting it by the afternoon post. He said to himself that there would be time then to send out telegrams and to obtain the military occupation of the pits, if such was the desire of those gentlemen. In his own opinion there would certainly be a battle and an expenditure of blood. This responsibility troubled him in spite of his habitual energy.

Up to eleven o'clock he worked peacefully; there was no sound in the dead house except Hippolyte's waxing stick, which was rubbing a floor far away on the first story. Then one after the other he received two messages, the first announcing the attack on Jean-Bart by the Montsou band, the second telling of the cut cables, the overturned fires and all the destruction. He could not understand. Why had the strikers gone to Deneulin instead of attacking one of the company's pits? Besides, they were quite welcome to sack Vandame; that would merely ripen the plan of conquest which he was meditating. And at midday he lunched alone in the large dining room, served so quietly by the servant that he could not even hear his slippers. This solitude rendered his preoccupations more gloomy; he was feeling cold at the heart when a captain, who had arrived running, was shown in and told him of the mob's march on Mirou. Almost immediately, as he was finishing his coffee, a telegram informed him that Madeleine and Crèveœur were in their turn threatened. Then his perplexity became extreme. He was expecting the postman at two o'clock: ought he at once to ask for troops? Or would it be better to wait patiently and not to act until he had received the directors' orders? He went back into his study; he wished to read a report which he had asked Négrel to prepare the

day before for the prefect. But he could not put his hand on it; he reflected that perhaps the young man had left it in his room, where he often wrote at night, and without taking any decision, pursued by the idea of this report, he went upstairs to look for it in the room.

As he entered M. Hennebeau was surprised: the room had not been done, no doubt through Hippolyte's forgetfulness or laziness. There was a moist heat there, the close heat of the past night, made heavier from the mouth of the hot-air stove being left open; and he was suffocated, too, with the penetrating perfume, which he thought must be the odor of the toilet waters with which the basin was full. There was great disorder in the room—garments scattered about, damp towels thrown on the backs of chairs, the bed yawning, with a sheet drawn back and dragging on the carpet. But at first he only glanced round with an abstracted look as he went toward a table covered with papers to look for the missing report. Twice he examined the papers one by one, but it was certainly not there. Where the devil could that madcap Paul have stuffed it?

And as M. Hennebeau went back into the middle of the room, giving a glance at each article of furniture, he noticed in the open bed a bright point which shone like a star. He approached mechanically and put out his hand. It was a little gold scent bottle lying between two folds of the sheet. He at once recognized a scent bottle belonging to Mme Hennebeau, the little ether bottle which was always with her. But he could not understand its presence here: how could it have got into Paul's bed? And suddenly he grew terribly pale. His wife had slept there.

"Beg your pardon, sir," murmured Hippolyte's voice through the door. "I saw you going up."

The servant entered and was thrown into consternation by the disorder.

"Lord! Why, the room is not done! So Rose has gone out, leaving all the house on my shoulders!"

M. Hennebeau had hidden the bottle in his hand and was pressing it almost to breaking.

"What do you want?"

"It's another man, sir; he comes from Crèveœur with a letter."

"Good! Leave me alone; tell him to wait."

His wife had slept there! When he had bolted the door he opened his hand again and looked at the little bottle which had left its image in red on his flesh. Suddenly he saw and understood; this filthiness had been going on in his house for months. He recalled his old suspicion, the rustling against the doors, the naked feet at night through the silent house. Yes, it was his wife who went up to sleep there!

Falling into a chair opposite the bed, which he gazed at fixedly, he remained some minutes as though crushed. A noise aroused him; someone was knocking at the door, trying to open it. He recognized the servant's voice.

"Sir—ah, you are shut in, sir."

"What is it now?"

"There seems to be a hurry; the men are breaking everything. There are two messengers below. There are also some telegrams."

"You just leave me alone! I am coming directly."

The idea that Hippolyte would himself have discovered the scent bottle, had he done the room in the morning, had just frozen him. And besides, this man must know; he must have found the bed still hot with adultery twenty times over, with Madame's hairs trailing on the pillow and abominable traces staining the linen. The man kept interrupting him, and it could only be out of inquisitiveness. Perhaps he had stayed with his ear stuck to the door, excited by the debauchery of his masters.

H. Hennebeau did not move. He still gazed at the bed. His long past of suffering unrolled before him: his marriage with this woman, their immediate misunderstanding of the heart and of the flesh, the lovers whom she had had, unknown to him, and the lover whom he had tolerated for ten years, as one tolerates an impure taste in a sick woman. Then came their arrival at Montsou, the mad hope of curing her, months of languor, of sleepy exile, the approach of old age which would, perhaps, at last give her back to him. Then their nephew arrived, this Paul to whom she became a mother and to whom she spoke of her dead heart buried forever beneath the ashes. And he, the imbecile husband, foresaw nothing; he adored this woman who was his wife, whom other men had possessed but whom he alone could not possess! He adored her with shameful passion, so that he would have fallen on his knees if she would but have given him the leavings of other men! The leavings of the others she gave to this child.

The sound of a distant gong at this moment made M. Hennebeau start. He recognized it; it was struck, by his orders, when the postman arrived. He rose and spoke aloud, breaking into the flood of coarseness with which his parched throat was bursting in spite of himself.

"Ah, I don't care a bloody hang for their telegrams and their letters! Not a bloody hang!"

Now he was carried away by rage, the need of some sewer in which to stamp down all this filthiness with his heels. This woman was a vulgar drab; he sought for crude words and buffeted her image with them. The sudden idea of the marriage between Cécile and Paul, which she was arranging with so quiet a smile, completed his exasperation. There was, then, not even passion, not even jealousy at the bottom of this persistent sensuality? It was now a perverse plaything, the habit of the woman, a recreation taken like an accustomed dessert. And he put all the responsibility on her; he regarded as almost innocent the lad at whom she had bitten in this reawakening of appetite, just as one bites at an early green fruit, stolen by the wayside. Whom would she devour, on whom would she fall, when she no longer had complacent nephews, sufficiently practical to accept in their own family the table, the bed and the wife?

There was a timid scratch at the door, and Hippolyte allowed himself to whisper through the keyhole:

"The postman, sir. And Monsieur Dansaert, too, has come back, saying that they are killing one another."

"I'm coming down, good God!"

What should he do to them? Chase them away on their return from Marchiennes, like stinking animals whom he would no longer have beneath his roof? He would take a cudgel and would tell them to carry elsewhere their poisonous coupling. It was with their sighs, with their mixed breaths, that the damp warmth of this room had grown heavy; the penetrating odor which had suffocated him was the odor of musk which his wife's skin exhaled, another perverse taste, a fleshly need of violent perfumes; and he seemed to feel also the heat and odor of fornication, of living adultery, in the pots which lay about, in the basin still full, in the disorder of the linen, of the furniture, of the entire room tainted with vice. The fury of impotence threw him onto the bed, which he struck with his fists, belaboring the places where he saw the imprint of their two bodies, enraged with the disordered coverlets and the crumpled sheets, soft and inert beneath his blows, as though exhausted themselves by the embraces of the whole night.

But suddenly he thought he heard Hippolyte coming up again. He was arrested by shame. For a moment he stood panting, wiping his forehead, calming the bounds of his heart. Standing before a mirror, he looked at his face, so changed that he did not recognize himself. Then when he had watched it gradually grow calmer by an effort of supreme will, he went downstairs.

Five messengers were standing below, not counting Dansaert. All brought him news of increasing gravity concerning the march of the strikers among the pits, and the chief captain told him at length what had gone on at Mirou and the fine behavior of Father Quandieu. He listened, nodding his head, but he did not hear; his thoughts were in the room upstairs. At last he sent them away, saying that he would take due measures. When he was alone again, seated before his desk, he seemed to grow drowsy, with his head between his hands, covering his eyes. His mail was there, and he decided to look for the expected letter, the directors' reply. The lines at first danced before him, but he understood at last that these gentlemen desired a skirmish; certainly they did not order him to make things worse, but they allowed it to be seen that disturbances would hasten the conclusion of the strike by provoking energetic repression. After this he no longer hesitated but sent off telegrams on all sides—to the prefect of Lille, to the corps of soldiery at Douai, to the police at Marchiennes. It was a relief; he had nothing to do but shut himself in; he even spread the report that he was suffering from gout. And all the afternoon he hid himself in his study, receiving no one, contenting himself with reading the telegrams and letters which continued to rain in. He thus followed the mob from afar, from Madeleine to Crèvecœur, from Crèvecœur to the Victoire, from the Victoire to Gaston-Marie. Information also reached him concerning the panic of the police and the troops, wandering along the roads and always with their backs to the pit attacked. They might kill one another and destroy everything! He put his head between his hands again, with his fingers over his eyes, and buried himself in the deep silence of the empty house, where he only heard now and then the noise of the cook's saucepans at her large fire, preparing the evening's dinner.

The twilight was already darkening the room; it was five o'clock when a

disturbance made M. Hennebeau jump, as he sat dazed and inert with his elbows in his papers. He thought that it was the two wretches coming back. But the tumult increased, and a terrible cry broke out just as he was going to the window:

"Bread! Bread! Bread!"

It was the strikers, now invading Montsou, while the police, expecting an attack on the Voreux, were galloping off in the opposite direction to occupy that pit.

Just then, two kilometers away from the first houses, a little beyond the crossways where the main road cut the Vandame road, Mme Hennebeau and the young ladies had witnessed the passing of the mob. The day had been spent pleasantly at Marchiennes; it had been a delightful lunch with the manager of the forges, then an interesting visit to the workshops and to the neighboring glassworks to occupy the afternoon; and as they were now going home in the limpid decline of the beautiful winter day, Cécile had had the whim to drink a glass of milk, as she noticed a little farm near the edge of the road. They all then got down from the carriage, and Négrel gallantly leaped off his horse, while the peasant woman, alarmed by all these fine people, rushed about and spoke of laying a cloth before serving the milk. But Lucie and Jeanne wanted to see the cow milked, and they went into the cattle shed with their cups, making a little rural party and laughing greatly at the litter, in which they buried themselves.

Mme Hennebeau, with her complacent maternal air, was drinking with the edge of her lips, when a strange snorting noise from without disturbed her.

"What is that then?"

The cattle shed, built at the edge of the road, had a large door for carts, for it was also used as a barn for hay. The young girls, who had put out their heads, were astonished to see on the left a black flood, a shouting band which was moving along the Vandame road.

"The deuce!" muttered Négrel, who had also gone out. "Are our brawlers getting angry at last?"

"It is perhaps the colliers again," said the peasant woman. "This is twice they've passed. Seems things are not going well; they're masters of the country."

She uttered every word prudently, watching the effect on their faces, and when she noticed the fright of all of them and their deep anxiety at this encounter, she hastened to conclude:

"Oh, the rascals! The rascals!"

Négrel, seeing that it was too late to get into their carriage and reach Montsou, ordered the coachman to bring the vehicle into the farmyard, where it would remain hidden behind a shed. He himself fastened his horse, which a lad had been holding, beneath the shed. When he came back he found his aunt and the young girls distracted and ready to follow the peasant woman, who proposed that they should take refuge in her house. But he was of opinion that they would be safer where they were, for certainly no one would come and look for them in the hay. The door, however, shut very badly and

had such large cracks in it that the road could be seen between the worm-eaten wood.

"Come, courage!" he said. "We will sell our lives dearly."

This joke increased their fear. The noise grew louder, but nothing could yet be seen; along the vacant road the wind of a tempest seemed to be blowing, like those sudden gusts which precede great storms.

"No, no! I don't want to look," said Cécile, going to hide herself in the hay.

Mme Hennebeau, who was very pale and felt angry with these people who had spoiled her pleasure, stood in the background with a sidelong look of repugnance, while Lucie and Jeanne, though trembling, had placed their eyes at a crack, anxious to lose nothing of the spectacle.

A sound of thunder came near; the earth was shaken, and Jeanlin galloped up first, blowing into his horn.

"Take out your scent bottles, the sweat of the people is passing by!" murmured Négrel, who, in spite of his Republican convictions, liked to make fun of the populace when he was with ladies.

But his wit was carried away in the hurricane of gestures and cries. The women had appeared, nearly a thousand of them, with outspread hair disheveled by running, the naked skin appearing through their rags, the nakedness of females weary with giving birth to starvelings. A few held their little ones in their arms, raising them and shaking them like banners of mourning and vengeance. Others, who were younger, with the swollen breasts of amazons, brandished sticks, while frightful old women were yelling so loudly that the cords of their fleshless necks seemed to be breaking. And then the men came up, two thousand madmen—trammers, pikemen, menders—a compact mass which rolled along like a single block in confused, serried rank so that it was impossible to distinguish their faded trousers or ragged woolen jackets, all effaced in the same earthy uniformity. Their eyes were burning, and one only distinguished the holes of black mouths singing the "Marsellaise"; the stanzas were lost in a confused roar, accompanied by the clang of sabots over the hard earth. Above their heads, amid the bristling iron bars, an ax passed by, carried erect, and this single ax, which seemed to be the standard of the band, showed in the clear air the sharp profile of a guillotine blade.

"What atrocious faces!" stammered Mme Hennebeau.

Négrel said between his teeth:

"Devil take me if I can recognize one of them! Where do the bandits spring from?"

And, in fact, anger, hunger, these two months of suffering and this enraged helter-skelter through the pits had lengthened the placid faces of the Montsou colliers into the muzzles of wild beasts. At this moment the sun was setting; its last rays of somber purple cast a gleam of blood over the plain. The road seemed to be full of blood; men and women continued to rush by, bloody as butchers in the midst of slaughter.

"Oh, superb!" whispered Lucie and Jeanne, stirred in their artistic tastes by the beautiful horror of it.

They were frightened, however, and drew back close to Mme Hennebeau, who was leaning on a trough. She was frozen at the thought that a glance between the planks at that disjointed door might suffice to murder them. Négrel also, who was usually very brave, felt himself grow pale, seized by a terror that was superior to his will, the terror which comes from the unknown. Cécile, in the hay, no longer stirred; and the others, in spite of the wish to turn away their eyes, could not do so: they were compelled to gaze.

It was the red vision of the revolution, which would one day inevitably carry them all away on some bloody evening at the end of the century. Yes, some evening the people, unbridled at last, would thus gallop along the roads, making the blood of the middle class flow. They would hang up heads and sprinkle about gold from disemboweled coffers. The women would yell; the men would have these wolf-like jaws open to bite. Yes, there would be the same rags, the same thunder of great sabots, the same terrible troop, with dirty skins and tainted breath, sweeping away the old world beneath an overflowing flood of barbarians. Fires would flame; they would not leave standing one stone of the towns; they would return to the savage life of the woods, after the great rut, the great feast day, when the poor in one night would reduce women to leanness and rich men's cellars to emptiness. There would be nothing left, not a sou of the great fortunes, not a title deed of acquired properties, until the day dawned and a new earth would perhaps spring up once more. Yes, it was these things which were passing along the road; it was the force of Nature herself, and they were receiving the terrible wind of it in their faces.

A great cry rose, dominating the "Marseillaise":

"Bread! Bread! Bread!"

Lucie and Jeanne pressed themselves against Mme Hennebeau, who was almost fainting, while Négrel placed himself before them as though to protect them by his body. Was the old social order cracking this very evening? And what they saw immediately after completed their stupefaction. The band had nearly passed by; there were only a few stragglers left, when Mouquette came up. She was delaying, watching the bourgeois at their garden gates or the windows of their houses, and whenever she saw them, as she was not able to spit in their faces, she showed them what for her was the climax of contempt. Doubtless she perceived someone now, for suddenly she raised her skirts, bent her back and showed her enormous buttocks, naked beneath the last rays of the sun. There was nothing obscene in those fierce buttocks, and nobody laughed.

Everything disappeared; the flood rolled on to Montsou along the turns of the road, between the low houses streaked with bright colors. The carriage was drawn out of the yard, but the coachman would not take it upon him to convey back Madame and the young ladies without delay; the strikers occupied the street. And the worst was there was no other road.

"We must go back, however, for dinner will be ready," said Mme Hennebeau, exasperated by annoyance and fear. "These dirty workpeople have again chosen a day when I have visitors. How can you do good to such creatures?"

Lucie and Jeanne were occupied in pulling Cécile out of the hay. She was

struggling, believing that those savages were still passing by, and repeating that she did not want to see them. At last they all took their places in the carriage again. It then occurred to Négrel, who had remounted, that they might go through the Réquillart lanes.

"Go gently," he said to the coachman, "for the path is atrocious. If any groups prevent you from returning to the road over there you can stop behind the old pit, and we will return on foot through the little garden door, while you can put up the carriage and horses anywhere, in some inn outhouse."

They set out. The band, far away, was streaming into Montsou. As they had twice seen police and military, the inhabitants were agitated and seized by panic. Abominable stories were circulating; it was said that written placards had been set up, threatening to rip open the bellies of the bourgeois. Nobody had read them, but all the same they were able to quote the exact words. At the lawyer's especially the terror was at its height, for he had just received by post an anonymous letter warning him that a barrel of powder was buried in his cellar and that it would be blown up if he did not declare himself on the side of the people. Just then the Grégoires, prolonging their visit on the arrival of this letter, were discussing it and decided that it must be the work of a joker, when the invasion of the mob completed the terror of the house. They, however, smiled, drawing back a corner of the curtain to look out, and refused to admit that there was any danger, certain, they said, that all would finish up well. Five o'clock struck, and they had time to wait until the street was free for them to cross the road to dine with the Hennebeaus, where Cécile, who had surely returned, must be waiting for them. But no one in Montsou seemed to share their confidence. People were wildly running about; doors and windows were banged to. They saw Maigrat, on the other side of the road, barricading his shop with a large supply of iron bars and looking so pale and trembling that his feeble little wife was obliged to fasten the screws. The band had come to a halt before the manager's villa, and the cry echoed:

"Bread! Bread! Bread!"

M. Hennebeau was standing at the window when Hippolyte came in to close the shutters, for fear the windows would be broken by stones. He closed all on the ground floor and then went up to the first floor; the creak of the window fasteners was heard and the clack of shutters one by one. Unfortunately it was not possible to shut the kitchen window in the area in the same way, a window made disquietingly ruddy by the gleams from the saucepans and the spit.

Mechanically M. Hennebeau, who wished to look out, went up to Paul's room on the second floor: it was on the left, the best situated, for it commanded the road as far as the company's yards. And he stood behind the blinds overlooking the crowd. But this room had again overcome him, the toilet table sponged and in order, the cold bed with neat and well-drawn sheets. All his rage of the afternoon, that furious battle in the depths of his silent solitude, had now turned to an immense fatigue. His whole being was now like this room, grown cold, swept of the filth of the morning, returned to its habitual

correctness. What was the good of a scandal? Had anything really changed in his house? His wife had simply taken another lover; it scarcely aggravated the fact that she had chosen him in the family; perhaps, even, it was an advantage, for she thus preserved appearances. He pitied himself when he thought of his mad jealousy. How ridiculous to have struck that bed with his fists! Since he had tolerated another man, he could certainly tolerate this one. It was only a matter of a little more contempt. A terrible bitterness was poisoning his mouth, the uselessness of everything, the eternal pain of existence, shame for himself, who always adored and desired this woman in the dirt in which he had abandoned her.

Beneath the window the yells broke out with increased violence:

"Bread! Bread! Bread!"

"Idiots!" said M. Hennebeau between his clenched teeth.

He heard them abusing him for his large salary, calling him a bloated idler, a bloody beast who stuffed himself to indigestion with good things, while the worker was dying of hunger. The women had noticed the kitchen, and there was a tempest of imprecations against the pheasant roasting there, against the sauces that with fat odors irritated their empty stomachs. Ah, the stinking bourgeois, they should be stuffed with champagne and truffles till their guts burst.

"Bread! Bread! Bread!"

"Idiots!" repeated M. Hennebeau. "Am I happy?"

Anger arose in him against these people who could not understand. He would willingly have made them a present of his large salary to possess their hard skin and their facility of coupling without regret. Why could he not seat them at his table and stuff them with his pheasant, while he went to fornicate behind the hedges, to tumble the girls over, making fun of those who had tumbled them over before him! He would have given everything, his education, his comfort, his luxury, his power as manager, if he could be for one day the vilest of the wretches who obeyed him, free of his flesh, enough of a blackguard to beat his wife and to take his pleasure with his neighbors' wives. And he longed also to be dying of hunger, to have an empty belly, a stomach twisted by cramps that would make his head turn with giddiness: perhaps that would have killed the eternal pain. Ah, to live like a brute, to possess nothing, to scour the fields with the ugliest and dirtiest putter and to be able to be happy!

"Bread! Bread! Bread!"

Then he grew angry and shouted furiously in the tumult:

"Bread! Is that enough, idiots?"

He could eat, and all the same he was groaning with torment. His desolate household, his whole wounded life, choked him at the throat like a death agony. Things were not for the best because one had bread. Who was the fool who placed earthly happiness in the partition of wealth? These revolutionary dreamers might demolish society and rebuild another society; they would not add one joy to humanity; they would not take away one pain by cutting bread and butter for everybody. They would even enlarge the un-

happiness of the earth; they would one day make the very dogs howl with despair when they had taken them out of the tranquil satisfaction of instinct, to raise them to the unappeasable suffering of passion. No, the one good thing was not to exist and, if one existed, to be a tree, a stone, less still, a grain of sand, which cannot bleed beneath the heels of the passer-by.

And in this exasperation of his torment tears swelled in M. Hennebeau's eyes and broke in burning drops on his cheeks. The twilight was drowning the road when stones began to riddle the front of the villa. With no anger now against these starving people, only enraged by the burning wound at his heart, he continued to stammer in the midst of his tears:

"Idiots! Idiots!"

But the cry of the belly dominated, and a roar blew like a tempest, sweeping everything before it:

"Bread! Bread! Bread!"

CHAPTER VI

SOBERED by Catherine's blows, Etienne had remained at the head of his mates. But while he was hoarsely urging them on to Montsou he heard another voice within him, the voice of reason, asking, in astonishment, the meaning of all this. He had not intended any of these things; how had it happened that, having set out for Jean-Bart with the object of acting calmly and preventing disaster, he had finished this day of increasing violence by besieging the manager's villa?

He it certainly was, however, who had just cried, "Halt!" Only at first his sole idea had been to protect the company's yards, which there had been talk of sacking. And now that stones were already grazing the façade of the villa he sought in vain for some lawful prey on which to throw the band, so as to avoid greater misfortunes. As he thus stood alone, powerless, in the middle of the road, he was called by a man standing on the threshold of the *Estaminet* Tison, where the landlady had just put up the shutters in haste, leaving only the door free.

"Yes, it's me. Will you listen?"

It was Rasseneur. Some thirty men and women, nearly all belonging to the settlement of the Deux-Cent-Quarante, who had remained at home in the morning and had come in the evening for news, had invaded this *estaminet* on the approach of the strikers. Zacharie occupied a table with his wife Philomène. Farther on Pierron and Pierronne, with their backs turned, were hiding their faces. No one was drinking; they had simply taken shelter.

Etienne recognized Rasseneur and was turning away when the latter added:

"You don't want to see me, eh? I warned you; things are getting awkward. Now you may ask for bread; they'll give you lead."

Then Etienne came back and replied:

"What troubles me is the cowards who fold their arms and watch us risking our skins."

"Your notion then is to pillage over there?" asked Rasseneur.

"My notion is to remain to the last with our friends, quit by dying together."

In despair Etienne went back into the crowd, ready to die. On the road three children were throwing stones, and he gave them a good kick, shouting out to his comrades that it was no good breaking windows.

Bébert and Lydie, who had rejoined Jeanlin, were learning from him how to work the sling. They each sent a flint, playing at who could do the most damage. Lydie had awkwardly cracked the head of a woman in the crowd, and the two boys were loudly laughing. Bonnemort and Mouque, seated on a bench, were gazing at them behind. Bonnemort's swollen legs bore him so badly that he had great difficulty in dragging himself so far; no one knew what curiosity impelled him, for his face had the earthy look of those days when he never spoke a word.

Nobody, however, any longer obeyed Etienne. The stones, in spite of his orders, went on hailing, and he was astonished and terrified by these brutes he had unmuzzled, who were so slow to move and then so terrible, so ferociously tenacious in their rage. All the old Flemish blood was there, heavy and placid, taking months to get heated and then giving itself up to abominable savagery, listening to nothing until the beast was glutted by atrocities. In his southern land crowds flamed up more quickly, but they did not affect so much. He had to struggle with Levaque to obtain possession of his ax, and he knew not how to keep back the Maheus, who were throwing flints with both hands. The women, especially, terrified him—the Levaque, Mouquette and the others—who were agitated by murderous fury, with teeth and nails out, barking like bitches and driven on by Mother Brûlé, whose lean figure dominated them.

But there was a sudden stop; a moment's surprise brought a little of that calmness which Etienne's supplications could not obtain. It was simply the Grégoires, who had decided to bid farewell to the lawyer and to cross the road to the manager's house, and they seemed so peaceful; they so clearly had the air of believing that the whole thing was a joke on the part of their worthy miners, whose resignation had nourished them for a century, that the latter, in fact, left off throwing stones, for fear of hitting this old gentleman and old lady who had fallen from the sky. They allowed them to enter the garden, mount the steps and ring at the barricaded door, which was by no means opened in a hurry. Just then Rose, the housemaid, was returning, laughing at the furious workmen, all of whom she knew, for she belonged to Montsou. And it was she who, by striking her fists against the door, at last forced Hippolyte to set it ajar. It was time, for as the Grégoires disappeared the hail of stones began again. Recovering from its astonishment, the crowd was shouting louder than ever:

"Death to the bourgeois! Hurrah for the people!"

Rose went on laughing in the hall of the villa, as though amused by the adventure, and repeated to the terrified manservant:

"They're not badhearted; I know them."

M. Grégoire methodically hung up his hat. Then when he had assisted Mme Grégoire to draw off her thick cloth mantle he said, in his turn:

"Certainly they have no malice at bottom. When they have shouted well they will go home to supper with more appetite."

At this moment M. Hennebeau came down from the second story. He had seen the scene and came to receive his guests in his usual cold and polite manner. The pallor of his face alone revealed the grief which had shaken him. The man was tamed; there only remained in him the correct administrator resolved to do his duty.

"You know," he said, "the ladies have not yet come back."

For the first time some anxiety disturbed the Grégoires. Cécile not come back! How could she come back now if the miners were to prolong their joking?

"I thought of having the place cleared," added M. Hennebeau. "But the misfortune is that I'm alone here and, besides, I do not know where to send my servant to bring me four men and a corporal to clear away this mob."

Rose, who had remained there, ventured to murmur anew:

"Oh, sir, they are not badhearted!"

The manager shook his head while the tumult increased outside, and they could hear the faint crash of the stones against the house.

"I don't wish to be hard on them; I can even excuse them; one must be as foolish as they are to believe that we are anxious to injure them. But it is my duty to prevent disturbance. To think that there are police all along the roads, as I am told, and that I have not been able to see a single man since the morning!"

He interrupted himself and drew back before Mme Grégoire, saying:

"Let me beg you, madame, do not stay here; come into the drawing room."

But the cook, coming up from below in exasperation, kept them in the hall a few minutes longer. She declared that she could no longer accept any responsibility for the dinner, for she was expecting from the Marchiennes pastry cook some *vol-au-vent* crusts which she had ordered for four o'clock. The pastry cook had evidently stayed on the road for fear of these bandits. Perhaps they had even pillaged his hampers. She saw the *vol-au-vent* blockaded behind a bush, besieged, going to swell the bellies of the three thousand wretches who were asking for bread. In any case, Monsieur was warned; she would rather pitch her dinner into the fire if it were to be spoiled because of the revolt.

"Patience, patience," said M. Hennebeau. "All is not lost; the pastry cook may come."

And as he turned toward Mme Grégoire, opening the drawing-room door himself, he was very surprised to observe, seated on the hall bench, a man whom he had not distinguished before in the deepening shade.

"What, you, Maigrat! What is it then?"

Maigrat arose; his fat, pale face was changed by terror. He no longer possessed his usual calm stolidity; he humbly explained that he had slipped into the manager's house to ask for aid and protection should the brigands attack his shop.

"You see that I am threatened myself and that I have no one," replied M. Hennebeau. "You would have done better to stay at home and guard your property."

"Oh, I have put up iron bars, and then I have left my wife."

The manager showed impatience and did not conceal his contempt. A fine guard, that poor creature worn out by blows!

"Well, I can do nothing; you must try to defend yourself. I advise you to go back at once, for there they are again demanding bread. Listen!"

In fact, the tumult began again, and Maigrat thought he heard his own name in the midst of the cries. To go back was no longer possible; they would have torn him to pieces. Besides, the idea of his ruin overcame him. He pressed his face to the glass panel of the door, perspiring and trembling in anticipation of disaster, while the Grégoires decided to go into the drawing room.

M. Hennebeau quietly endeavored to do the honors of his house. But he begged his guests in vain to sit down; the close barricaded room, lit by two lamps in the daytime, was filled with terror at each new clamor from without. Amid the stuffy hangings the fury of the mob rolled more disturbingly with vague and terrible menace. They talked, however, constantly brought back to this inconceivable revolt. He was astonished at having foreseen nothing, and his information was so defective that he specially talked against Rasseneur, whose detestable influence, he said, he was able to recognize. Besides, the gendarmes would come; it was impossible that he should be thus abandoned. As to the Grégoires, they only thought about their daughter, the poor darling, who was so quickly frightened! Perhaps in face of the peril the carriage had returned to Marchiennes. They waited on for another quarter of an hour, worn out by the noise in the street and by the sound of the stones from time to time striking the closed shutters, which rang out like gongs. The situation was no longer bearable. M. Hennebeau spoke of going out to chase away the brawlers by himself and to meet the carriage, when Hippolyte appeared, exclaiming:

"Sir! Sir! Here is Madame! They are killing Madame!"

The carriage had not been able to pass through the threatening groups in the Réquillart lane. Négrel had carried out his idea, walking the hundred meters which separated them from the house and knocking at the little door which led to the garden, near the common. The gardener would hear them, for there was always someone there to open. And at first things had gone perfectly; Mme Hennebeau and the young ladies were already knocking when some women, who had been warned, rushed into the lane. Then everything was spoiled. The door was not opened, and Négrel in vain sought to burst it open with his shoulder. The rush of women increased, and fearing they would be carried away, he adopted the desperate method of pushing his aunt and the young girls before him, in order to reach the front steps, by passing through the besiegers. But this maneuver led to a hustling. They were not left free; a shouting band followed them, while the crowd floated up to right and to left, without understanding, simply astonished at these dressed-up ladies lost in the midst of the battle. At this moment the confusion was so great that

it led to one of those curious mistakes which can never be explained. Lucie and Jeanne reached the steps and slipped in through the door, which the housemaid opened; Mme Hennebeau had succeeded in following them, and behind them Négrel at last came in and then bolted the door, feeling sure that he had seen Cécile go in first. She was no longer there, having disappeared on the way, so carried away by fear that she had turned her back to the house and had moved of her own accord into the thick of danger.

At once the cry arose:

"Hurrah for the people! Death to the bourgeois! To death with them!"

A few of those in the distance, beneath the veil which hid her face, mistook her for Mme Hennebeau; others said she was a friend of the manager's wife, the young wife of a neighboring manufacturer who was execrated by his men. And, besides, it mattered little; it was her silk dress, her fur mantle, even the white feather in her hat, which exasperated them. She smelled of perfume; she wore a watch; she had the delicate skin of a lazy woman who had never touched coal.

"Stop!" shouted Mother Brûlé. "We'll put it on your arse, that lace!"

"The lazy sluts steal it from us," said the Levaque. "They stick fur onto their skins while we are dying of cold. Just strip her naked to show her how to live!"

At once Mouquette rushed forward.

"Yes, yes! Whip her!"

And the women, in this savage rivalry, struggled and stretched out their rags, as though each were trying to get a morsel of this rich girl. No doubt her backside was not better made than anyone else's. More than one of them were rotten beneath their gewgaws. This injustice had lasted quite long enough; they should be forced to dress themselves like workwomen, these harlots who dared to spend half a franc on the washing of a single petticoat.

In the midst of these furies Cécile was shaking with paralyzed legs, stammering over and over again the same phrase:

"Ladies, please, please! Ladies, please don't hurt me!"

But she suddenly uttered a shrill cry; cold hands had seized her by the neck. The rush had brought her near old Bonnemort, who had taken hold of her. He seemed drunk from hunger, stupefied by his long misery, suddenly arousing himself from the resignation of half a century, under the influence of no one knew what malicious impulse. After having in the course of his life saved a dozen mates from death, risking his bones in firedamps and landslips, he was yielding to things which he would not have been able to express, fascinated by this young girl's white neck. And as on this day he had lost his tongue, he clenched his fingers, with his air of an old, infirm animal ruminating over his recollections.

"No! No!" yelled the women. "Uncover her *arse*! Out with her *arse*!"

In the villa, as soon as they had realized the mishap, Négrel and M. Hennebeau bravely reopened the door to run to Cécile's help. But the crowd was now pressing against the garden railings, and it was not easy to go out. A struggle took place here while the Grégoires, in terror, stood on the steps.

"Let her be then, old man! It's the Piolaine young lady," cried Maheude to the grandfather, recognizing Cécile, whose veil had been torn off by one of the women.

On his side, Etienne, overwhelmed at this retaliation on a child, was trying to force the band to let go their prey. An inspiration came to him; he brandished the ax, which he had snatched from Levaque's hands.

"To Maigrat's house, by God! There's bread in there! Down to the earth with Maigrat's damned shed!"

And at random he gave the first blow of the ax against the shop door. Some comrades had followed him—Levaque, Maheu and a few others. But the women were furious, and Cécile had fallen from Bonnemort's fingers into Mother Brûlé's hands. Lydie and Bébert, led by Jeanlin, had slipped on all fours between her petticoats to see the lady's bottom. Already the women were pulling her about; her clothes were beginning to split, when a man on horseback appeared, pushing on his animal and using his riding whip on those who would not stand back quick enough.

"Ah, rascals! You are going to flog our daughters, are you?"

It was Deneulin, who had come to the rendezvous for dinner. He quickly jumped onto the road, took Cécile by the waist and, with the other hand manipulating his horse with remarkable skill and strength, he used it as a living wedge to split the crowd, which drew back before the onset. At the railing the battle continued. He passed through, however, with some bruises. This unforeseen assistance delivered Négrel and M. Hennebeau, who were in great danger amid the oaths and blows. And while the young man at last led in the fainting Cécile, Deneulin protected the manager with his tall body and at the top of the steps received a stone which nearly put his shoulder out.

"That's it," he cried; "break my bones now you've broken my engines!"

He promptly pushed the door to, and a volley of flints fell against it.

"What madmen!" he exclaimed. "Two seconds more and they would have broken my skull like an empty gourd. There is nothing to say to them; what could you do? They know nothing; you can only knock them down."

In the drawing room the Grégoires were weeping as they watched Cécile recover. She was not hurt; there was not even a scratch to be seen; only her veil was lost. But their fright increased when they saw before them their cook Mélanie, who described how the mob had demolished Piolaine. Mad with fear, she had run to warn her masters. She had come in when the door was ajar at the moment of the fray, without anyone noticing her, and in her endless narrative the single stone with which Jeanlin had broken one windowpane became a regular cannonade which had crushed through the walls. Then M. Grégoire's ideas were altogether upset: they were murdering his daughter; they were razing his house to the ground; it was then true that these miners could bear him ill will because he lived like a worthy man on their work?

The housemaid, who had brought in a towel and some eau de cologne, repeated:

"All the same it's queer; they're not badhearted."

Mine Hennebeau, seated and very pale, had not recovered from the shock

to her feelings, and she was only able to find a smile when Négrel was complimented. Cécile's parents especially thanked the young man, and the marriage might now be regarded as settled. M. Hennebeau looked on in silence, turning from his wife to this lover whom in the morning he had been swearing to kill, then to this young girl by whom he would, no doubt, soon be freed from him. There was no haste; only the fear remained with him of seeing his wife fall lower, perhaps to some lackey.

"And you, my little darlings," asked Deneulin of his daughters, "have they broken any of your bones?"

Lucie and Jeanne had been much afraid, but they were pleased to have seen it all. They were now laughing.

"By George," the father went on, "we've had a fine day! If you want a dowry you would do well to earn it yourselves, and you may also expect to have to support me."

He was joking, but his voice trembled. His eyes swelled with ears as his two daughters threw themselves into his arms.

M. Hennebeau had heard this confession of ruin. A quick thought lit up his face. Vandame would now belong to Montsou; this was the hoped-for compensation, the stroke of fortune which would bring him back to favor with the gentlemen on the directorate. At every crisis of his existence he took refuge in the strict execution of the orders he had received; in the military discipline in which he lived he found his small share of happiness.

But they grew calm; the drawing room fell back into a weary peacefulness, with the quiet light of its two lamps and the warm stuffiness of the hangings. What then was going on outside? The brawlers were silent, and stones no longer struck the house; one only heard deep, dull blows, those blows of the hatchet which one hears in distant woods. They wished to find out and went back into the hall to venture a glance through the glass panel of the door. Even the ladies went upstairs to post themselves behind the blinds on the first story.

"Do you see that scoundrel Rasseneur over there on the threshold of the public house?" said M. Hennebeau to Deneulin. "I had guessed as much; he must be in it."

It was not Rasseneur, however; it was Etienne, who was dealing blows from his ax at Maigrat's shop. And he went on calling to the men: did not the goods in there belong to the colliers? Had they not the right to take back their property from this thief who had exploited them so long, who was starving them at a hint from the company? Gradually they all left the manager's house and ran up to pillage the neighboring shop. The cry, "Bread! Bread! Bread!" broke out anew. They would find bread behind that door. The rage of hunger carried them away, as if they suddenly felt that they could wait no longer without expiring on the road. Such furious thrusts were made at the door that at every stroke of the ax Etienne feared to wound someone.

Meanwhile Maigrat, who had left the hall of the manager's house, had at first taken refuge in the kitchen; but, hearing nothing there, he imagined some abominable attempt against his shop and came up again to hide behind the

pump outside, when he distinctly heard the cracking of the door and shouts of pillage in which his own name was mixed. It was not a nightmare then. If he could not see he could now hear, and he followed the attack with ringing ears; every blow struck him in the heart. A hinge must have given way; five minutes more and the shop would be taken. The thing was stamped on his brain in real and terrible images—the brigands rushing forward, then the drawers broken open, the sacks emptied, everything eaten, everything drunk, the house itself carried away, nothing left, not even a stick with which he might go and beg through the villages. No, he would never allow them to complete his ruin; he would rather leave his life there. Since he had been here he noticed at a window of his house his wife's thin silhouette, pale and confused, behind the panes; no doubt she was watching the blows with her usual silent air of a poor, beaten creature. Beneath there was a shed, so placed that from the villa garden one could climb it from the palings; then it was easy to get onto the tiles up to the window. And the idea of thus returning home now pursued him in his remorse at having left. Perhaps he would have time to barricade the shop with furniture; he even invented other and more heroic defenses—boiling oil, lighted petroleum, poured out from above. But this love of his property struggled against his fear, and he groaned in the battle with cowardice. Suddenly, on hearing a deeper blow of the ax, he made up his mind. Avarice conquered; he and his wife would cover the sacks with their bodies rather than abandon a single loaf.

Almost immediately hooting broke out:

"Look! Look! The tomcat's up there! After the cat! After the cat!"

The mob had just seen Maigrat on the roof of the shed. In his fever of anxiety he had climbed the palings with agility in spite of his weight and without troubling over the breaking wood, and now he was flattening himself along the tiles and endeavoring to reach the window. But the slope was very steep; he was incommoded by his stoutness, and his nails were torn. He would have dragged himself up, however, if he had not begun to tremble with the fear of stones, for the crowd, which he could not see, continued to cry beneath him:

"After the cat! After the cat! Do for him!"

And suddenly both his hands let go at once, and he rolled down like a ball, leaped at the gutter and fell across the middle wall in such a way that by ill chance he rebounded on the side of the road, where his skull was broken open on the corner of a stone pillar. His brain had spurted out. He was dead. His wife up above, pale and confused behind the windowpanes, still looked out.

They were stupefied at first. Etienne stopped short, and the ax slipped from his hands. Maheu, Levaque and the others forgot the shop, with their eyes fixed on the wall along which a thin red streak was slowly flowing down. And the cries ceased, and silence spread over the growing darkness.

All at once the hooting began again. It was the women, who rushed forward, overcome by the drunkenness of blood.

"Then there is a good God after all! Ah, the bloody beast, he's done for!"

They surrounded the still-warm body. They insulted it with laughter, abus-

ing his fractured head, the dirty chops, hurling in the dead man's face the long venom of their starved lives.

"I owed you sixty francs; now you're paid, thief!" said Maheude, enraged like the others. "You won't refuse me credit any more. Wait! Wait! I must fatten you once more!"

With her fingers she scratched up some earth, took two handfuls and stuffed it violently into his mouth.

"There! Eat that! There! Eat! Eat! You used to eat us!"

The abuse increased while the dead man, stretched on his back, gazed motionless with his large fixed eyes at the immense sky from which the night was falling. This earth heaped in his mouth was the bread which he had refused to give. And henceforth he would eat of no other bread. It had not brought him luck to starve poor people.

But the women had another revenge to wreak on him. They moved round, smelling him like she-wolves. They were all seeking for some outrage, some savagery, that would relieve them.

Mother Brûlé's shrill voice was heard: "Cut him like a tomeat!"

"Yes, yes, after the eat! After the eat! He's done too much, the dirty beast!"

Mouquette was already unfastening and drawing off the trousers, while the Levaque woman raised the legs. And Mother Brûlé, with her dry old hands, separated the naked thighs and seized this dead virility. She took hold of everything, tearing with an effort which bent her lean spine and made her long arms crack. The soft skin resisted—she had to try again—and at last carried away the fragment, a lump of hairy and bleeding flesh, which she brandished with a laugh of triumph.

"I've got it! I've got it!"

Shrill voices saluted with curses the abominable trophy.

"Ah, swine! You won't fill our daughters any more!"

"Yes, we've done with paying on your beastly body; we shan't any more have to offer a backside in return for a loaf."

"Here, I owe you six francs; would you like to settle it? I'm quite willing, if you can do it still!"

This joke shook them all with terrible gaiety. They showed each other the bleeding fragment as an evil beast from which each of them had suffered and which they had at last crushed and saw before them there, inert, in their power. They spat on it; they thrust out their jaws, saying over and over again with furious bursts of contempt:

"He can do no more! He can do no more! It's no longer a man that they'll put away in the earth. Go and rot then, good-for-nothing!"

Mother Brûlé then planted the whole lump on the end of her stick and, holding it in the air, bore it about like a banner, rushing along the road, followed, helter-skelter, by the yelling troop of women. Drops of blood rained down, and that pitiful flesh hung like a waste piece of meat on a butcher's stall. Up above, at the window, Mme Maigrat still stood motionless, but beneath the last gleams of the setting sun the confused flaws of the windowpanes distorted her white face, which looked as though it were laughing. Beaten

and deceived at every hour, with shoulders bent from morning to night over a ledger, perhaps she was laughing while the band of women rushed along with that evil beast, that crushed beast, at the end of the stick.

This frightful mutilation was accomplished in frozen horror. Neither Etienne nor Maheu nor the others had had time to interfere; they stood motionless before this gallop of Furies. At the door of the Estaminet Tison a few heads were grouped—Rasseneur, pale with disgust; Zacharie and Philomène, stupefied at what they had seen. The two old men, Bonnemort and Mouque, were gravely shaking their heads. Only Jeanlin was making fun, pushing Bébert with his elbow and forcing Lydie to look up. But the women were already coming back, turning round and passing beneath the manager's windows. Behind the blinds the ladies were stretching out their necks. They had not been able to observe the scene, which was hidden from them by the wall, and they could not distinguish well in the growing darkness.

"What is it they have at the end of that stick?" asked Cécile, who had grown bold enough to look out.

Lucie and Jeanne declared that it must be a rabbitskin.

"No, no," murmured Mme Hennebeau, "they must have been pillaging a pork butcher's; it seems to be a remnant of a pig."

At this moment she shuddered and was silent. Mme Grégoire had nudged her with her knee. They both remained stupefied. The young ladies, who were very pale, asked no more questions but with large eyes followed this red vision through the darkness.

Etienne once more brandished the ax. But the feeling of anxiety did not disappear; this corpse now barred the road and protected the shop. Many had drawn back. Satiety seemed to have appeased them all. Maheu was standing by gloomily, when he heard a voice whisper in his ear to escape. He turned round and recognized Catherine, still in her old overcoat, black and panting. With a movement he repelled her. He would not listen to her; he threatened to strike her. With a gesture of despair she hesitated and then ran toward Etienne.

"Save yourself! Save yourself! The gendarmes are coming!"

He also pushed her away and abused her, feeling the blood of the blows she had given him mounting to his cheeks. But she would not be repelled; she forced him to throw down the ax and drew him away by both arms with irresistible strength.

"Don't I tell you the gendarmes are coming! Listen to me. It's Chaval who has gone for them and is bringing them, if you want to know. It's too much for me, and I've come. Save yourself; I don't want them to take you."

And Catherine drew him away, while at the same instant a heavy gallop shook the street from afar. Immediately a voice arose, "The gendarmes! The gendarmes!" There was a general breaking up, so mad a rush for life that in two minutes the road was free, absolutely clear, as though swept by a hurricane. Maigrat's corpse alone made a patch of shadow on the white earth. Before the Estaminet Tison, Rasseneur only remained, feeling relieved and with open face applauding the easy victory of the sabers, while in dim and deserted Montsou, in the silence of the closed houses, the bourgeois remained

with perspiring skins and chattering teeth, not daring to look out. The plain was drowned beneath the thick night; only the blast furnaces and the coke furnaces were burning against the tragic sky. The gallop of the gendarmes heavily approached; they came up in an indistinguishable, somber mass. And behind them the Marchiennes pastry cook's vehicle, a little covered cart which had been confided to their care, at last arrived, and a small drudge of a boy jumped down and quietly unpacked the crusts for the *vol-au-vent*.

PART SIX

CHAPTER I

THE FIRST FORTNIGHT of February passed, and a black cold prolonged the hard winter without pity for the poor. Once more the authorities had scoured the roads; the prefect of Lille, an attorney, a general and the police were not sufficient; the military had come to occupy Montsou. A whole regiment of men were camped between Beaugnies and Marchiennes. Armed pickets guarded the pits, and there were soldiers before every engine. The manager's villa, the company's yards, even the houses of certain residents, were bristling with bayonets. Nothing was heard along the streets but the slow movement of patrols. On the pit bank of the Voreux a sentinel was always placed in the frozen wind that blew up there, like a lookout man above the flat plain; and every two hours, as though in an enemy's country, were heard the sentry's cries:

"Qui vive? Give the password!"

Nowhere had work been resumed. On the contrary, the strike had spread; Crèvecœur, Mirou, Madeleine, like the Voreux, were producing nothing; at Feutry-Cantel and the Victoire there were fewer men every morning; even at St Thomas, which had been hitherto exempt, men were wanting. There was now a silent persistence in the face of this exhibition of force which exasperated the miners' pride. The settlements looked deserted in the midst of the beetroot fields. Not a workman stirred; only at rare intervals was one to be met by chance, isolated, with sidelong look, lowering his head before the red trousers. And in this deep, melancholy calm, in this passive opposition to the guns, there was a deceptive gentleness, a forced and patient obedience of wild beasts in a cage, with their eyes on the tamer, ready to spring on his neck if he turned his back. The company, which was being ruined by this death of work, talked of hiring miners from the Borinage, on the Belgian frontier, but did not dare, so that the battle continued as before between the colliers, who were shut up at home, and the dead pits guarded by soldiery.

On the morrow of that terrible day this calm had come about at once, hiding such a panic that the greatest silence possible was kept concerning the damage and the atrocities. The inquiry which had been opened showed that Maigrat had died from his fall, and the frightful mutilation of the corpse re-

mained uncertain, already surrounded by a legend. On its side, the company did not acknowledge the disasters it had suffered, any more than the Grégoires cared to compromise their daughter in the scandal of a trial in which she would have to give evidence. However, some arrests took place, mere supernumeraries, as usual, silly and frightened, knowing nothing. By mistake Pierron was taken off with handcuffs at his wrists as far as Marchiennes, to the great amusement of his mates. Rasseneur, also, was nearly arrested by two gendarmes. The management was content with preparing lists of names and giving back certificates in large numbers. Maheu had received his, Levaque also, as well as thirty-four of their mates in the settlement of the Deux-Cent-Quarante alone. And all the severity was directed against Etienne, who had disappeared on the evening of the fray and who was being sought, although no trace of him could be found. Chaval, in his hatred, had denounced him, refusing to name the others at Catherine's appeal, for she wished to save her parents. The days passed; everyone felt that nothing was yet concluded, and with oppressed hearts everyone was awaiting the end.

At Montsou during this period the inhabitants awoke with a start every night, their ears buzzing with an imaginary alarm bell and their nostrils haunted by the smell of powder. But what completed their discomfiture was a sermon by the new curé, Abbé Ranvier, that lean priest with eyes like red-hot coals who had succeeded Abbé Joire. He was indeed unlike the smiling, discreet man, so fat and gentle, whose only anxiety was to live at peace with everybody. Abbé Ranvier went so far as to defend these abominable brigands who had dishonored the district. He found excuses for the atrocities of the strikers; he violently attacked the middle class, throwing on them the whole of the responsibility. It was the middle class which, by dispossessing the Church of its ancient liberties in order to misuse them itself, had turned this world into a cursed place of injustice and suffering; it was the middle class which prolonged misunderstandings, which was pushing on toward a terrible catastrophe by its atheism, by its refusal to return to the old beliefs, to the fraternity of the early Christians. And he dared to threaten the rich. He warned them that if they obstinately persisted in refusing to listen to the voice of God, God would surely put Himself on the side of the poor. He would take back their fortunes from those who faithlessly enjoyed them and would distribute them to the humble of the earth for the triumph of His glory. The devout trembled at this; the lawyer declared that it was socialism of the worst kind; all saw the curé at the head of a band, brandishing a cross and with vigorous blows demolishing the bourgeois society of '89.

M. Hennebeau, when informed, contented himself with saying, as he shrugged his shoulders:

"If he troubles us too much the bishop will free us from him."

And while the breath of panic was thus blowing from one end of the plain to the other Etienne was dwelling beneath the earth in Jeanlin's burrow at the bottom of Réquillart. It was there that he was in hiding; no one believed him so near; the quiet audacity of that refuge, in the very mine, in that abandoned passage of the old pit, had baffled search. Above the sloes and haw-

thorns growing among the fallen scaffolding of the belfry filled up the mouth of the hole. No one ventured down; it was necessary to know the trick—how to hang onto the roots of the mountain ash and to let go fearlessly, to catch hold of the rungs that were still solid. Other obstacles also protected him, the suffocating heat of the passage, a hundred and twenty meters of dangerous descent, then the painful gliding on all fours for a quarter of a league between the narrowed walls of the gallery before discovering the brigand's caveful of plunder. He lived there in the midst of abundance, finding gin there, the rest of the dried cod and provisions of all sorts. The large hay bed was excellent, and not a current of air could be felt in this equal temperature, as warm as a bath. Light, however, threatened to fail. Jeanlin, who had made himself purveyor with the prudence and discretion of a savage and delighted to make fun of the police, had even brought him pomatum but could not succeed in putting his hands on a packet of candles.

After the fifth day Etienne never lit up except to eat. He could not swallow in the dark. This complete and interminable night, always of the same blackness, was his chief torment. It was in vain that he was able to sleep in safety, that he was warm and provided with bread; the night had never weighed so heavily on his brain. It seemed to him even to crush his thoughts. Now he was living on thefts. In spite of his communistic theories, old scruples of education arose, and he contented himself with gnawing his share of dry bread. But what was to be done? One must live, and his task was not yet accomplished. Another shame overcame him: remorse for that savage drunkenness from the gin, drunk in the great cold on an empty stomach, which had thrown him, armed with a knife, on Chaval. This stirred in him the whole of that unknown terror, the hereditary ill, the long ancestry of drunkenness, no longer tolerating a drop of alcohol without falling into homicidal mania. Would he then end as a murderer? When he found himself in shelter, in this profound calm of the earth, seized by satiety of violence, he had slept the sleep of a brute, gorged and overcome, and the depression continued; he lived in a bruised state with bitter mouth and aching head, as after some tremendous spree. A week passed by; the Maheus, who had been warned, were not able to send a candle; he had to give up the enjoyment of light, even when eating.

Now Etienne remained for hours stretched out on his hay. Vague ideas were working within him for the first time: a feeling of superiority, which placed him apart from his mates, an exaltation of his person as he grew more instructed. Never had he reflected so much; he asked himself the why of his disgust on the morrow of that furious course among the pits, and he did not dare to reply to himself; his recollections were repulsive to him, the ignoble desires, the coarse instincts, the odor of all that wretchedness shaken out to the wind. In spite of the torment of the darkness he would come to hate the hour for returning to the settlement. How nauseous were all those wretches in a heap, living at the common bucket! There was not one with whom he could seriously talk politics; it was a bestial existence, always the same air tainted by onion, in which one choked! He wished to enlarge their horizon, to raise them to the comfort and good manners of the middle class, by making

them masters; but how long it would take, and he no longer felt the courage to await victory in this prison of hunger. By slow degrees his vanity of leadership, his constant preoccupation of thinking in their place, left him free, breathing into him the soul of one of those bourgeois whom he execrated.

Jeanlin one evening brought a candle end, stolen from a carter's lantern, and this was a great relief for Frienne. When the darkness began to stupefy him, weighing on his skull almost to madness, he would light up for a moment; then as soon as he had chased away the nightmare he extinguished the candle, miserly of this brightness which was as necessary to his life as bread. The silence buzzed in his ears; he only heard the flight of a band of rats, the cracking of the old timber, the tiny sound of a spider weaving her web. And with eyes open in this warm nothingness he returned to his fixed idea—the thought of what his mates were doing above. Desertion on his part would have seemed to him the worst cowardice. If he thus hid himself it was to remain free, to give counsel or to act. His long meditations had fixed his ambition. While awaiting something better he would like to be Pluchart, leaving manual work in order to work only at politics, but alone, in a clean room, under the pretext that brain labor absorbs the entire life and needs quiet.

At the beginning of the second week, the child having told him that the police supposed he had gone over to Belgium, Frienne ventured out of his hole at nightfall. He wished to ascertain the situation and to decide if it were still well to persist. He himself considered the game doubtful. Before the strike he felt uncertain of the result and had simply yielded to facts, and now after having been intoxicated with rebellion, he came back to this first doubt, despairing of making the company yield. But he would not yet confess this to himself; he was tortured when he thought of the miseries of defeat and the heavy responsibility of suffering which would weigh upon him. The end of the strike: was it not the end of his part, the overthrow of his ambition, his life falling back into the brutishness of the mine and the horrors of the settlement? And honestly, without any base calculation or falsehood, he endeavored to find his faith again, to prove to himself that resistance was still possible, that capital was about to destroy itself in face of the heroic suicide of labor.

Throughout the entire country, in fact, there was nothing but a long echo of ruin. At night when he wandered through the black country, like a wolf who had come out of his forest, he seemed to hear the crash of bankruptcies from one end of the plain to the other. He now passed by the roadside nothing but closed, dead workshops, becoming rotten beneath the dull sky. The sugar-works had especially suffered: the Hoton sugarworks, the Fauvelle works, after having reduced the number of their hands, had come to grief one after the other. At the Dutilleul flour works the last mill had stopped on the second Saturday of the month, and the Bleuze ropeworks, for mine cables, had been quite ruined by the lockout. On the Marchiennes side the situation was growing worse every day. All the fires were out at the Gagebois glassworks; men were continually being sent away from the Sonnevillie workshops; only one of the three blast furnaces of the forges was alight, and not one battery of coke ovens was burning on the horizon. The strike of the Montsou colliers, born of

the industrial crisis which had been growing worse for two years, had increased it and precipitated the downfall. To the other causes of suffering—the stoppage of orders from America and the engorgement of invested capital in excessive production—was now added the unforeseen lack of coal for the few furnaces which were still kept up, and that was the supreme agony, this engine bread which the pits no longer furnished. Frightened by the general anxiety, the company, by diminishing its output and starving its miners, inevitably found itself at the end of December without a fragment of coal at the surface of its pits. Everything held together; the plague blew from afar; one fall led to another; the industries tumbled each other over as they fell in so rapid a series of catastrophes that the shocks echoed in the midst of the neighboring cities, Lille, Douai, Valenciennes, where absconding bankers were bringing ruin on whole families.

At the turn of a road Etienne often stopped in the frozen night to hear the rubbish raining down. He breathed deeply in the darkness; the joy of annihilation seized him, the hope that day would dawn on the extermination of the old world, with not a single fortune left standing, the scythe of equality leveling everything to the ground. But in this massacre it was the company's pits that especially interested him. He would continue his walk, blinded by the darkness, visiting them one after the other, glad to discover some new disaster. Landslips of increasing gravity continued to occur on account of the prolonged abandonment of the passages. Above the north gallery of Mirou the ground sank in to such an extent that the Joiselle road, for the distance of a hundred meters, had been swallowed up as though by the shock of an earthquake; and the company, disturbed at the rumors raised by these accidents, paid the owners for their vanished fields without bargaining. Crèvecœur and Madeleine, which lay in very shifting rock, were becoming stopped up more and more. It was said that two captains had been buried at the Victoire; there was an inundation at Feutry-Cantel; it had been necessary to wall up a gallery for the length of a kilometer at St Thomas, where the ill-kept timbering was breaking down everywhere. Thus every hour enormous sums were spent, making great breaches in the shareholders' dividends; a rapid destruction of the pits was going on, which must end at last by eating up the famous Montsou deniers which had been centupled in a century.

In the face of these repeated blows hope was again born in Etienne; he came to believe that a third month of resistance would crush the monster—the weary, sated beast, crouching down there like an idol in his unknown tabernacle. He knew that after the Montsou troubles there had been great excitement in the Paris journals, quite a violent controversy between the official newspapers and the opposition newspapers, terrible narratives, which were especially directed against the International, of which the empire was becoming afraid after having first encouraged it; and the directors not daring to turn a deaf ear any longer, two of them had condescended to come and hold an inquiry, but with an air of regret, not appearing to care about the upshot, so disinterested that in three days they went away again, declaring that everything was going on as well as possible. He was told, however, from

other quarters that during their stay these gentlemen sat permanently, displaying feverish activity and absorbed in transactions of which no one about them uttered a word. And he charged them with affecting confidence they did not feel and came to look upon their departure as a nervous flight, feeling now certain of triumph since these terrible men were letting everything go.

But on the following night Etienne despaired again. The company's back was too robust to be so easily broken; they might lose millions, but later on they would get them back again by gnawing at their men's bread. On that night, having pushed as far as Jean-Bart, he guessed the truth when an overseer told him that there was talk of yielding Vandame to Montsou. At Deneulin's house, it was said, the wretchedness was pitiful, the wretchedness of the rich: the father ill in his powerlessness, aged by his anxiety over money; the daughters struggling in the midst of tradesmen, trying to save their shifts. There was less suffering in the famished settlements than in this middle-class house where they shut themselves up to drink water. Work had been resumed at Jean-Bart, and it had been necessary to replace the pump at Gaston-Marie, while in spite of all haste an inundation had already begun which made great expenses necessary. Deneulin had at last risked his request for a loan of one hundred thousand francs from the Grégoires, and the refusal, though he had expected it, completed his dejection: if they refused it was for his sake, in order to save him from an impossible struggle, and they advised him to sell. He, as usual, violently refused. It enraged him to have to pay the expenses of the strike; he hoped at first to die of it, with the blood at his head, strangled by apoplexy. Then what was to be done? He had listened to the directors' offers. They wrangled with him; they depreciated this superb prey, this repaired pit, equipped anew, where the lack of capital alone paralyzed the output. He would be lucky if he got enough out of it to satisfy his creditors. For two days he had struggled against the directors at Montsou, furious at the quiet way with which they took advantage of his embarrassment and shouting his refusals at them in his loud voice. And there the affair remained, and they had returned to Paris to await patiently his last groans. Etienne smelled out this compensation for the disasters and was again seized by discouragement before the invincible power of the great capitalists, so strong in battle that they fattened in defeat by eating the corpses of the small capitalists who fell at their side.

The next day, fortunately, Jeanlin brought him a piece of good news. At the Voreux the tubbing of the shaft was threatening to break, and the water was filtering in from all the joints; in great haste a gang of carpenters had been sent to repair it.

Up to now Etienne had avoided the Voreux, warned by the everlasting black silhouette of the sentinel stationed on the pit bank above the plain. He could not be avoided; he dominated in the air, like the flag of the regiment. Toward three o'clock in the morning the sky became overcast, and he went to the pit, where some mates explained to him the bad condition of the tubbing; they even thought that it would have to be done entirely over again, which would stop the output of coal for three months. For a long time he

prowled round, listening to the carpenters' mallets hammering in the shaft. That wound which had to be dressed rejoiced his heart.

As he went back in the early daylight he saw the sentinel still on the pit bank. This time he would certainly be seen. As he walked he thought about those soldiers who were taken from the people, to be armed against the people. How easy the triumph of the revolution would be if the army were suddenly to declare for it! It would be enough if the workman and the peasant in the barracks were to remember their origin. That was the supreme peril, the great terror, which made the teeth of the middle class chatter when they thought of the possible defection of the troops. In two hours they would be swept away and exterminated with all the delights and abominations of their iniquitous life. It was already said that whole regiments were tainted with socialism. Was it true? When justice came would it be thanks to the cartridges distributed by the middle class? And snatching at another hope, the young man dreamed that the regiment, with its posts now guarding the pits, would come over to the side of the strikers, shoot down the company to a man and at last give the mine to the miners.

He then noticed that he was ascending the pit bank, his head filled with these reflections. Why should he not talk with this soldier? He would get to know what his ideas were. With an air of indifference he continued to come nearer, as though he were gleaning old wood among the rubbish. The sentinel remained motionless.

"Eh, mate! Damned weather," said Etienne at last. "I think we shall have snow."

He was a small soldier, very fair, with a pale, gentle face covered with red freckles. He wore his military greatcoat with the awkwardness of a recruit.

"Yes, perhaps we shall, I think," he murmured.

And with his blue eyes he gazed at the livid sky, the smoky dawn, with soot weighing like lead afar over the plain.

"What idiots they are to put you here to freeze!" Etienne went on. "One would think the Cossacks were coming! And then there's always wind here."

The little soldier shivered without complaining. There was certainly a little cabin of dry stones there, where old Bonnemort used to take shelter when it blew a hurricane, but the order being not to leave the summit of the pit bank, the soldier did not stir from it, his hands so stiffened by cold that he could no longer feel his weapon. He belonged to the guard of sixty men who were protecting the Voreux, and as this cruel sentry duty frequently came round, he had before nearly stayed there for good with his dead feet. His work demanded it; a passive obedience finished the benumbing process, and he replied to these questions with the stammered words of a sleepy child.

Etienne in vain endeavored during a quarter of an hour to make him talk about politics. He replied yes or no without seeming to understand. Some of his comrades said that the captain was a Republican; as to him, he had no idea—it was all the same to him. If he were ordered to fire he would fire, so as not to be punished. The workman listened, seized by the popular hatred

against the army—against these brothers whose hearts were changed by sticking a pair of red pantaloons onto their buttocks.

"Then what's your name?"

"Jules."

"And where do you come from?"

"From Plogof, over there."

He stretched out his arm at random. It was in Brittany; he knew no more. His small pale face grew animated. He began to laugh and felt warmer.

"I have a mother and a sister. They are waiting for me, sure enough. Ah, it won't be for tomorrow. When I left they came with me as far as Pont-l'Abbé. We had to take the horse to Lepalmec: it nearly broke its legs at the bottom of the Audierne Hill. Cousin Charles was waiting for us with sausages, but the women were crying too much, and it stuck in our throats. Good lord, what a long way off our home is!"

His eyes grew moist, though he was still laughing. The desert moorland of Plogof, that wild, storm-beaten point of the Raz, appeared to him beneath a dazzling sun in the rosy season of heather.

"Do you think," he asked, "if I'm not punished, that they'll give me a month's leave in two years?"

Then Etienne talked about Provence, which he had left when he was quite small. The daylight was growing, and flakes of snow began to fly in the earthy sky. And at last he felt anxious on noticing Jeanlin, who was prowling about in the midst of the bushes, stupefied to see him up there. The child was beckoning to him. What was the good of this dream of fraternizing with the soldiers? It would take years and years, and his useless attempt cast him down as though he had expected to succeed. But suddenly he understood Jeanlin's gesture. The sentinel was about to be relieved, and he went away, running off to bury himself at Réquillart, his heart crushed once more by the certainty of defeat, while the little scamp who ran beside him was accusing that dirty beast of a trooper of having called out the guard to fire at them.

On the summit of the pit bank Jules stood motionless, with eyes vacantly gazing at the falling snow. The sergeant was approaching with his men, and the regulation cries were exchanged.

"Qui vive? Give the password!"

And they heard the heavy steps begin again, ringing as though on a conquered country. In spite of the growing daylight nothing stirred in the settlements; the colliers remained in silent rage beneath the military boot.

CHAPTER II

SNOW HAD BEEN FALLING for two days; since the morning it had ceased, and an intense frost had frozen the immense sheet. This black country, with its inky roads and walls and trees powdered with coal dust, was now white, a single whiteness stretching out without end. The Deux-Cent-Quarante settlement lay beneath the snow as though it had disappeared. No smoke came out

of the chimneys; the houses, without fire and as cold as the stones in the street, did not melt the thick layer on the tiles. It was nothing more than a quarry of white slabs in the white plain, a vision of a dead village wound in its shroud. Along the roads the passing patrols alone made a muddy mess with their stamping.

Among the Maheus the last shovelful of cinders had been burned the evening before, and it was no use any longer to think of gleaning on the pit bank in this terrible weather, when the sparrows themselves could not find a blade of grass. Alzire, from the obstinacy with which her poor hands had dug in the snow, was dying. Maheude had to wrap her up in the fragment of a coverlet while waiting for Dr Vanderhagen, for whom she had twice gone out without being able to find him. The servant had, however, promised that he would come to the settlement before night, and the mother was standing at the window watching, while the little invalid, who had wished to be downstairs, was shivering on a chair, having the illusion that it was better there near the cold grate. Old Bonnemort opposite, his legs bad once more, seemed to be sleeping; neither Lénore nor Henri had come back from scouring the roads, in company with Jeanlin, to ask for sous. Maheu alone was walking heavily up and down the bare room, stumbling against the wall at every turn with the stupid air of an animal which can no longer see its cage. The petroleum also was finished, but the reflection of the snow from outside was so bright that it vaguely lit up the room, in spite of the deepening night.

There was a noise of sabots, and the Levaque woman pushed open the door like a gale of wind, shouting furiously from the threshold at Maheude:

"Then it's you who have said that I forced my lodger to give me twenty sous when he sleeps with me?"

The other shrugged her shoulders.

"Don't bother me. I said nothing, and who told you so?"

"They tell me you said so; it doesn't concern you who it was. You even said you could hear us at our dirty tricks behind the wall and that the filth gets into our house because I'm always on my back. Just tell me you didn't say so, eh?"

Every day quarrels broke out as a result of the constant gossiping of the women. Especially between those households which lived door to door, squabbles and reconciliations took place every day. But never before had such bitterness thrown them one against the other. Since the strike hunger exasperated their rancor, so that they felt the need of blows; an altercation between two gossiping women finished by a murderous onset between their two men.

Just then Levaque arrived in his turn, dragging Bouteloup.

"Here's our mate; let him just say if he has given twenty sous to my wife to sleep with her."

The lodger, hiding his timid gentleness in his great beard, protested and stammered:

"Oh, that? No! Never anything! Never!"

At once Levaque became threatening and thrust his fist beneath Maheu's nose.

"You know that won't do for me. If a man's got a wife like that he ought to knock her ribs in. If not, then you believe what she says."

"By God!" exclaimed Maheu, furious at being dragged out of his dejection. "What is all this clatter again? Haven't we got enough to do with our misery? Just leave me alone, damn you, or I'll let you know it! And first, who says that my wife said so?"

"Who says so? Pierronne said so."

Maheude broke into a sharp laugh and, turning toward the Levaque woman:

"Ah! Pierronne, is it? Well, I can tell you what she told me. Yes, she told me that you sleep with both your men—the one underneath and the other on top!"

After that it was no longer possible to come to an understanding. They all grew angry, and the Levaques, as a reply to the Maheus, asserted that Pierronne had said a good many other things on their account: that they had sold Catherine, that they were all rotten together, even to the little ones, with a dirty disease caught by Etienne at the Volcan.

"She said that? She said that?" yelled Maheu. "Good! I'll go to her, I will, and if she says that she said that she shall feel my hand on her chops!"

He was carried out of himself, and the Levaques followed him to see what would happen, while Bouteloup, having a horror of disputes, furtively returned home. Excited by the altercation, Maheude was also going out when a complaint from Alzire held her back. She crossed the ends of the coverlet over the little one's quivering body and placed herself before the window, looking out vaguely. And that doctor, who still delayed!

At the Pierrons' door Maheu and the Levaques met Lydie, who was stamping in the snow. The house was closed, and a thread of light came through a crack in a shutter. The child replied at first to their questions with constraint: no, her father was not there; he had gone to the washhouse to join Mother Brûlé and bring back the bundle of linen. Then she was confused and would not say what her mother was doing. At last she let out everything with a sly, spiteful laugh: her mother had pushed her out of the door because M. Dansaert was there, and she prevented them from talking. Since the morning he had been going about the settlement with two policemen, trying to pick up workmen, imposing on the weak and announcing everywhere that if the descent did not take place on Monday at the Voreux the company had decided to hire men from the Borinage. And as the night came on he sent away the policemen, finding Pierronne alone; then he had remained with her to drink a glass of gin before a good fire.

"Hush! Hold your tongue! We must see them," said Levaque with a lewd laugh. "We'll explain everything directly. Get off with you, youngster."

Lydie drew back a few steps while he put his eye to a crack in the shutter. He stifled a low cry, and his back bent with a quiver. In her turn his wife looked through, but she said, as though taken by the colic, that it was disgusting. Maheu, who had pushed her, wishing also to see, then declared that he had had enough for his money. And they began again, in a row, each taking his glance, as at a peep show. The parlor, glittering with cleanliness, was en-

livened by a large fire; there were cakes on the table with a bottle and glasses, in fact, quite a feast. What they saw going on in there at last exasperated the two men, who under other circumstances would have laughed over it for six months. That she should let herself be stuffed up to the neck, with her skirts in the air, was funny. But, good God, was it not disgusting to do that in front of a great fire and to get up one's strength with biscuits, when the mates had neither a slice of bread nor a fragment of coal?

"Here's Father!" cried Lydie, running away.

Pierron was quietly coming back from the washhouse with the bundle of linen on his shoulder. Maheu immediately addressed him:

"Here, they tell me that your wife says that I sold Catherine and that we are all rotten in the house. And what do they pay you in your house, your wife and the gentleman who is this minute wearing out her skin?"

The astonished Pierron could not understand, and Pierronne, seized with fear on hearing the tumult of voices, lost her head and set the door ajar to see what was the matter. They could see her, looking very red, with her dress open and her skirt tucked up at her waist, while Dansaert, in the background, was wildly buttoning himself up. The head captain rushed away and disappeared, trembling with fear that this story would reach the manager's ears. Then there would be an awful scandal, laughter and hooting and abuse.

"You who are always saying that other people are dirty," shouted the Levaque woman to Pierronne; "it's not surprising that you're clean when you get the bosses to scour you."

"Ah, it's fine for her to talk!" said Levaque again. "Here's a trollop who says that my wife sleeps with me and the lodger, one below and the other above! Yes! Yes! That's what they tell me you say."

But Pierronne, grown calm, held her own against this abuse, very contemptuous in the assurance that she was the best looking and the richest.

"I've said what I've said; just leave me alone, will you! What have my affairs got to do with you, a pack of jealous creatures who want to get over us because we are able to save up money! Get along! Get along! You can say what you like; my husband knows well enough why Monsieur Dansaert was here."

Pierron, in fact, was furiously defending his wife. The quarrel turned. They accused him of having sold himself, of being a spy, the company's dog; they charged him with shutting himself up to gorge himself with the good things with which the bosses paid him for his treachery. In defense he pretended that Maheu had slipped beneath his door a threatening paper with two cross-bones and a dagger above. And this necessarily ended in a struggle between the men, as the quarrels of the women always did now that famine was enraging the mildest. Maheu and Levaque rushed on Pierron with their fists and had to be separated.

Blood was flowing from her son-in-law's nose when Mother Brûlé, in her turn, arrived from the washhouse. When informed of what had been going on she merely said:

"The damned beast dishonors me!"

The road was becoming deserted; not a shadow spotted the naked whiteness of the snow, and the settlement, falling back into its deathlike immobility, went on starving beneath the intense cold.

"And the doctor?" asked Maheu as he shut the door.

"Not come," replied Maheude, still standing before the window.

"Are the little ones back?"

"No, not back."

Maheu again began his heavy walk from one wall to the other, looking like a stricken ox. Father Bonnemort, seated stiffly on his chair, had not even lifted his head. Alzire also had said nothing and was trying not to shiver, so as to avoid giving them pain, but in spite of her courage in suffering she sometimes trembled so much that one could hear against the coverlet the quivering of the little invalid girl's lean body, while with her large open eyes she stared at the ceiling, from which the pale reflection of the white gardens lit up the room like moonshine.

The emptied house was now in its last agony, having reached a final stage of nakedness. The mattress ticks had followed the wool to the dealers; then the sheets had gone, the linen, everything that could be sold. One evening they had sold a handkerchief of the grandfather's for two sous. Tears fell over each object of the poor household which had to go, and the mother was still lamenting that one day she had carried away in her skirt the rose cardboard box, her man's old present, as one would carry away a child to get rid of it on some doorstep. They were bare; they had only their skins left to sell, so worn out and injured that no one would have given a farthing for them. They no longer even took the trouble to search; they knew that there was nothing left, that they had come to the end of everything, that they must not hope even for a candle or a fragment of coal or a potato, and they were waiting to die, only grieved about the children and revolted by the useless cruelty that gave the little one a disease before starving it.

"At last, here he is!" said Maheude.

A black figure passed before the window. The door opened, but it was not Dr Vanderhagen; they recognized the new curé, Abbé Ranvier, who did not seem surprised at coming on this dead house, without light, without fire, without bread. He had already been to three neighboring houses, going from family to family, seeking willing listeners, like Dansaert with his two policemen, and at once he exclaimed in his feverish fanatic's voice:

"Why were you not at Mass on Sunday, my children? You are wrong; the Church alone can save you. Now promise me to come next Sunday."

Maheu, after staring at him, went on pacing heavily without a word. It was Maheude who replied:

"To Mass, sir? What for? Isn't the good God making fun of us? Look here! What has my little girl there done to Him to be shaking with fever? It seems that we hadn't enough misery, that He had to make her ill, too, just when I can't even give her a cup of warm gruel."

Then the priest stood and talked at length. He spoke of the strike, this terrible wretchedness, this exasperated rancor of famine, with the ardor of a

missionary who is preaching to savages for the glory of religion. He said that the Church was with the poor, that she would one day cause justice to triumph by calling down the anger of God on the iniquities of the rich. And that day would come soon, for the rich had taken the place of God and were governing without God in their impious theft of power. But if the workers desired the fair division of the goods of the earth they ought at once to put themselves in the hands of the priests, just as on the death of Jesus the poor and the humble grouped themselves around the Apostles. What strength the Pope would have, what an army the clergy would have under them, when they were able to command the numberless crowd of workers! In one week they would purge the world of the wicked; they would chase away the unworthy masters. Then, indeed, there would be a real reign of God—everyone recompensed according to his merits, and the law of work as the foundation for universal happiness.

Maheude, who was listening to him, seemed to hear Etienne in those autumn evenings when he announced to them the end of their evils. Only she had always distrusted the cloth.

"That's very well what you say there, sir," she replied, "but that's because you no longer agree with the bourgeois. All our other curés dined at the manager's and threatened us with the devil as soon as we asked for bread."

He began again and spoke of the deplorable misunderstanding between the Church and the people. Now in veiled phrases he hit at the town curés, at the bishops, at the highly placed clergy, sated with enjoyment, gorged with domination, making pacts with the liberal middle class in the imbecility of their blindness, not seeing that it was this middle class which had dispossessed them of the empire of the world. Deliverance would come from the country priests, who would all rise to re-establish the kingdom of Christ with the help of the poor, and already he seemed to be at their head; he raised his bony form like the chief of a band, an evangelical revolutionary, his eyes so filled with light that they illuminated the gloomy room. This enthusiastic sermon lifted him to mystic heights, and the poor people had long ceased to understand him.

"No need for so many words," growled Maheu suddenly. "You'd best begin by bringing us a loaf."

"Come on Sunday to Mass," cried the priest. "God will provide for everything."

And he went off to catechize the Levaques, in their turn, so carried away by his dream of the final triumph of the Church and so contemptuous of facts that he would thus go through the settlements without charities, with empty hands amid this army dying of hunger, being a poor devil himself who looked upon suffering as the spur to salvation.

Maheu continued his pacing, and nothing was heard but his regular tramp which made the floor tremble. There was the sound of a rust-eaten pulley; old Bonnemort was spitting into the cold grate. Then the rhythm of the feet began again. Alzire, weakened by fever, was rambling in a low voice, laughing, thinking that it was warm and that she was playing in the sun.

"Good gracious!" muttered Maheude after having touched her cheeks.

"How she burns! I don't expect that damned beast now; the brigands must have stopped him from coming."

She meant the doctor and the company. She uttered a joyous exclamation, however, when the door once more opened. But her arms fell back and she remained standing still with gloomy face.

"Good evening," whispered Etienne when he had carefully closed the door.

He often came thus at nighttime. The Maheus learned his retreat after the second day. But they kept the secret, and no one in the settlement knew exactly what had become of the young man. A legend had grown up around him. People still believed in him, and mysterious rumors circulated: he would reappear with an army and chests full of gold, and there was always the religious expectation of a miracle, the realized ideal, a sudden entry into that city of justice which he had promised them. Some said they had seen him lying back in a carriage with three other gentlemen in the Marchiennes road; others affirmed that he was in England for a few days. At length, however, suspicions began to arise, and jokers accused him of hiding in a cellar where Mouquette kept him warm, for this relationship, when known, had done him harm. There was a growing disaffection in the midst of his popularity, a gradual increase of the despairing among the faithful, and their number was certain, little by little, to grow.

"What brutal weather!" he added. "And you—nothing new, always from bad to worse? They tell me that little Négrel has been to Belgium to get Borains. Good God! We are done for if that is true!"

He shuddered as he entered this dark icy room, where it was some time before his eyes were able to see the unfortunate people whose presence he guessed by the deepening of the shade. He was experiencing the repugnance and discomfort of the workman who has risen above his class, refined by study and stimulated by ambition. What wretchedness! And odors! And the bodies in a heap! And a terrible pity caught him by the throat. The spectacle of this agony so overcame him that he tried to find words to advise submission.

But Maheu came violently up to him, shouting:

"Borains! They won't dare, the bloody fools! Let the Borains go down then if they want us to destroy the pits!"

With an air of constraint Etienne explained that it was not possible to move, that the soldiers who guarded the pits would protect the descent of the Belgian workmen. And Maheu clenched his fists, irritated especially, as he said, by having bayonets in his back. Then the colliers were no longer masters in their own place? They were treated then like convicts, forced to work by a loaded musket! He loved his pit; it was a great grief to him not to have been down for two months. He was driven wild, therefore, at the idea of this insult, these strangers whom they threatened to introduce. Then the recollection that his certificate had been given back to him struck him to the heart.

"I don't know why I'm angry," he muttered. "I don't belong to their shop any longer. When they have hunted me away from here I may as well die on the road."

"As to that," said Etienne, "if you like they'll take your certificate back tomorrow. People don't send away good workmen."

He interrupted himself, surprised to hear Alzire, who was laughing softly in the delirium of her fever. So far he had only made out Father Bonnemort's stiff shadow, and this gaiety of the sick child frightened him. It was indeed too much if the little ones were going to die of it. With trembling voice he made up his mind.

"Look here! This can't go on; we are done for. We must give it up."

Maheude, who had been motionless and silent up to now, suddenly broke out and, treating him familiarly and swearing like a man, she shouted in his face:

"What's that you say? It's you who say that, by God!"

He was about to give reasons, but she would not let him speak.

"Don't repeat that, by God, or, woman as I am, I'll put my fist into your face. Then we have been dying for two months, and I have sold my household, and my little ones have fallen ill of it, and there is to be nothing done, and the injustice is to begin again! Ah, do you know, when I think of that my blood stands still. No, no, I would burn everything; I would kill everything rather than give up."

She pointed at Maheu in the darkness with a vague, threatening gesture.

"Listen to this! If my man goes back to the pit he'll find me waiting for him on the road to spit in his face and cry coward!"

Etienne could not see her, but he felt a heat like the breath of a barking animal. He had drawn back, astonished at this fury which was his work. She was so changed that he could no longer recognize the woman who was once so sensible, reproving his violent schemes, saying that we ought not to wish anyone dead, and who was now refusing to listen to reason and talking of killing people. It was not he now, it was she, who talked politics, who dreamed of sweeping away the bourgeois at a stroke, who demanded the republic and the guillotine to free the earth of these rich robbers who fattened on the labor of starvelings.

"Yes, I could flay them with my fingers. We've had enough of them! Our turn is come now; you used to say so yourself. When I think of the father, the grandfather, the grandfather's father, what all of them who went before have suffered, what we are suffering, and that our sons and our sons' sons will suffer it over again, it makes me mad—I could take a knife. The other day we didn't do enough at Montsou; we ought to have pulled the bloody place to the ground, down to the last brick. And, do you know, I've only one regret, that we didn't let the old man strangle the Piolaine girl. Hunger may strangle my little ones, for all they care!"

Her words fell like the blows of an ax in the night. The closed horizon would not open, and the impossible ideal was turning to poison in the depths of this skull which had been crushed by grief.

"You have misunderstood," Etienne was able to say at last, beating a retreat. "We ought to come to an understanding with the company. I know that the pits are suffering much, so that it would probably consent to an arrangement."

"No, never!" she shouted.

Just then Lénore and Henri came back with their hands empty. A gentleman had certainly given them two sous, but the girl kept kicking her little brother, and the two sous fell into the snow, and as Jeanlin had joined in the search they had not been able to find them.

"Where is Jeanlin?"

"He's gone away, Mother; he said he had business."

Etienne was listening with an aching heart. Once she had threatened to kill them if they ever held out their hands to beg. Now she sent them herself onto the roads and proposed that all of them—the ten thousand colliers of Montsou—should take stick and wallet, like beggars of old, and scour the terrified country.

The anguish continued to increase in the black room. The little urchins came back hungry; they wanted to eat; why could they not have something to eat? And they grumbled, flung themselves about and at last trod on the feet of their dying sister, who groaned. The mother furiously boxed their ears in the darkness at random. Then as they cried still louder, asking for bread, she burst into tears and dropped onto the floor, seizing them in one embrace with the little invalid; then for a long time her tears fell in a nervous outbreak which left her limp and worn out, stammering over and over again the same phrase, calling for death:

"O God, why do you not take us? O God, in pity take us, to have done with it!"

The grandfather preserved his immobility, like an old tree twisted by the rain and wind, while the father continued walking between the fireplace and the cupboard without turning his head.

But the door opened, and this time it was Dr Vanderhagen.

"The devil!" he said. "This light won't spoil your eyes. Look sharp! I'm in a hurry."

As usual, he scolded, knocked up by work. Fortunately he had matches with him, and the father had to strike six, one by one, and to hold them while he examined the invalid. Unwound from her coverlet, she shivered beneath this flickering light, as lean as a bird dying in the snow, so small that one only saw her hump. But she smiled with the wandering smile of the dying, and her eyes were very large, while her poor hands contracted over her hollow breast. And as the half-choked mother asked if it were right to take away from her the only child who helped in the household, so intelligent and gentle, the doctor grew vexed.

"Ah, she is going. Dead of hunger, your blessed child. And not the only one either; I've just seen another one over there. You all send for me, but I can't do anything; it's meat that you want to cure you."

Maheu, with burned fingers, had dropped the match, and the darkness closed over the little corpse, which was still warm. The doctor had gone away in a hurry. Etienne heard nothing more in the black room but Maheude's sobs, repeating her cry for death, that melancholy and endless lamentation:

"O God, it is my turn; take me! O God, take my man, take the others, out of pity, to have done with it!"

CHAPTER III

ON THAT SUNDAY, ever since eight o'clock, Souvarine had been sitting alone in the parlor of the *Avantage*, at his accustomed place, with his head against the wall. Not a single collier knew where to get two sous for a drink, and never had the bars had fewer customers. So Mme Rasseneur, motionless, at the counter, preserved an irritated silence, while Rasseneur, standing before the iron fireplace, seemed to be gazing with a reflective air at the red smoke from the coal.

Suddenly in this heavy silence of an overheated room three light, quick blows struck against one of the windowpanes made Souvarine turn his head. He rose, for he recognized the signal which Etienne had already used several times before in order to call him, when he saw him from without, smoking his cigarette at an empty table. But before the engineman could reach the door Rasseneur had opened it and, recognizing the man who stood there in the light from the window, he said to him:

"Are you afraid that I shall sell you? You can talk better here than on the road."

Etienne entered. Mme Rasseneur politely offered him a glass, which he refused with a gesture. The innkeeper added:

"I guessed long ago where you hide yourself. If I were a spy, as your friends say, I should have sent the police after you a week ago."

"There is no need for you to defend yourself," replied the young man. "I know that you have never eaten that sort of bread. People may have different ideas and esteem each other all the same."

And there was silence once more. Souvarine had gone back to his chair with his back to the wall and his eyes fixed on the smoke from his cigarette, but his feverish fingers were moving restlessly, and he pushed them over his knees, seeking the warm fur of Poland, who was absent this evening; it was an unconscious discomfort, something that was lacking; he could not exactly say what.

Seated on the other side of the table, Etienne at last said:

"Tomorrow work begins again at the *Voreux*. The Belgians have come with little *Négrel*."

"Yes, they landed them at nightfall," muttered Rasseneur, who remained standing. "As long as they don't kill each other, after all!"

Then raising his voice:

"Now, you know, I don't want to begin our disputes over again, but this will end badly if you hold out any longer. Why, your story is just like that of your *International*. I met Pluchart the day before yesterday at Lille, where I went on business. It's going wrong, that machine of his."

He gave details. The association, after having conquered the workers of the

whole world in an outburst of propaganda, which had left the middle class still shuddering, was now being devoured and slowly destroyed by an internal struggle between vanities and ambitions. Since the anarchists had triumphed in it, chasing out the earlier evolutionists, everything was breaking up; the original aim, the reform of the wage system, was lost in the midst of the squabbling of sects; the scientific framework was disorganized by the hatred of discipline. And already it was possible to foresee the final miscarriage of this general revolt which for a moment had threatened to carry away in a breath the old rotten society.

"Pluchart is ill over it," Rasseneur went on. "And he has no voice at all now. All the same, he talks on in spite of everything and wants to go to Paris. And he told me three times over that our strike was done for."

Etienne, with his eyes on the ground, let him talk on without interruption. The evening before he had chatted with some mates, and he felt that breaths of spite and suspicion were passing over him, those first breaths of unpopularity which forerun defeat. And he remained gloomy; he would not confess dejection in the presence of a man who had foretold to him that the crowd would hoot him in his turn on the day when they had to avenge themselves for a miscalculation.

"No doubt the strike is done for; I know that as well as Pluchart," he said. "But we foresaw that. We accepted this strike against our wishes; we didn't count on finishing up with the company. Only one gets carried away; one begins to expect things, and when it turns out badly one forgets that one ought to have expected that, instead of lamenting and quarreling as if it were a catastrophe tumbled down from heaven."

"Then if you think the game's lost," asked Rasseneur, "why don't you make the mates listen to reason?"

The young man looked at him fixedly.

"Listen! Enough of this. You have your ideas; I have mine. I came in here to show you that I feel esteem for you in spite of everything. But I still think that if we come to grief over this trouble our starved carcasses will do more for the people's cause than all your common-sense politics. Ah, if one of those bloody soldiers would just put a bullet in my heart, that would be a fine way of ending!"

His eyes were moist, as in this cry there broke out the secret desire of the vanquished, the refuge in which he desired to lose his torment forever.

"Well said!" declared Mme Rasseneur, casting on her husband a look which was full of all the contempt of her radical opinions.

Souvarine, with a vague gaze, feeling about with his nervous hands, did not appear to hear. His fair girlish face, with the thin nose and small pointed teeth, seemed to be growing savage in some mystic dream full of bloody visions. And he began to dream aloud, replying to a remark of Rasseneur's about the International which had been let fall in the course of the conversation.

"They are all cowards; there is only one man who can make their machine into a terrible instrument of destruction. It requires will, and none of them have will, and that's why the revolution will miscarry once more."

He went on in a voice of disgust, lamenting the imbecility of men, while the other two were rather disturbed by these somnambulistic confidences made in the darkness. In Russia there was nothing going on well, and he was in despair over the news he had received. His old companions were all turning to the politicians; the famous Nihilists who made Europe tremble—sons of popes, of the lower middle class, of tradesmen—could not rise above the idea of national liberation and seemed to believe that the world would be delivered when they had killed their despot. As soon as he spoke to them of razing society to the ground like a ripe harvest—as soon as he even pronounced the infantine word “republic”—he felt that he was misunderstood and a disturber, henceforth unclassified, enrolled among the lost leaders of cosmopolitan revolution. His patriotic heart struggled, however, and it was with painful bitterness that he repeated his favorite expression:

“Foolery! They’ll never get out of it with their foolery.”

Then lowering his voice still more, in a few bitter words he described his old dream of fraternity. He had renounced his rank and his fortune; he had gone among workmen in the hope of seeing at last the foundation of a new society of work in common. All the sous in his pockets had long gone to the urchins of the settlement; he had been as tender as a brother with the colliers, smiling at their suspicion, winning them over by his quiet workmanlike ways and his dislike of chattering. But decidedly the fusion had not taken place; he remained a stranger, with his contempt of all bonds, his desire to keep himself free of all petty vanities and enjoyments. And since this morning he had been especially exasperated by reading an incident in the newspapers.

His voice changed; his eyes grew bright; he fixed them on Etienne, directly addressing him:

“Now do you understand that? These hatworkers at Marseilles who have won the great lottery prize of a hundred thousand francs have gone off at once and invested it, declaring that they are going to live without doing anything! Yes, that is your idea, all of you French workmen; you want to unearth a treasure in order to devour it alone afterward in some lazy, selfish corner. You may cry out as much as you like against the rich; you haven’t got courage enough to give back to the poor the money that luck brings you. You will never be worthy of happiness as long as you own anything, and your hatred of the bourgeois proceeds from a wish to be in their place.”

Rasseneur burst out laughing. The idea that the Marseilles workmen ought to renounce the big prize seemed to him absurd. But Souvarine grew pale; his face changed and became terrible in one of those religious rages which exterminate nations. He cried:

“You will all be mown down, overthrown, cast to the dunghheap. Someone will be born who will annihilate your race of cowards and pleasure seekers. And look here! You see my hands? If my hands were able they would take up the earth like that and shake it until it was smashed to fragments and you were all buried beneath the rubbish.”

“Well said,” declared Mme Rasseneur with her polite and convinced air.

There was silence again. Then Etienne spoke once more of the Borinage

men. He questioned Souvarine concerning the steps that had been taken at the Voreux. But the engineman was still preoccupied and scarcely replied. He only knew that cartridges would be distributed to the soldiers who were guarding the pit, and the nervous restlessness of his fingers over his knees increased to such an extent that at last he became conscious of what was lacking—the soft and soothing fur of the tame rabbit.

"Where is Poland then?" he asked.

The innkeeper laughed again as he looked at his wife. After an awkward silence he made up his mind:

"Poland? She is in the pot."

Since her adventure with Jeanlin the pregnant rabbit, no doubt wounded, had only brought forth dead young ones, and to avoid feeding a useless mouth they had resigned themselves that very day to serve her up with potatoes.

"Yes, you ate one of her legs this evening. Eh! You licked your fingers after it!"

Souvarine had not understood at first. Then he became very pale, and his face contracted with nausea, while in spite of his stoicism two large tears were swelling beneath his eyelids.

But no one had time to notice this emotion, for the door had opened roughly and Chaval had appeared, pushing Catherine before him. After having made himself drunk with beer and bluster in all the public houses of Montsou, the idea had occurred to him to go to the *Avantage* to show his old friends that he was not afraid. As he came in he said to his mistress:

"By God! I tell you, you shall drink a glass in here; I'll break the jaws of the first man who looks askance at me!"

Catherine, moved at the sight of Etienne, had become very pale. When Chaval, in his turn, perceived him he grinned in his evil fashion.

"Two glasses, Madame Rasseneur! We're wetting the new start of work."

Without a word she poured out, as a woman who never refused her beer to anyone. There was silence, and neither the landlord nor the two others stirred from their places.

"I know people who've said that I was a spy," Chaval went on swaggeringly, "and I expect them just to say it again to my face, so that we can have a bit of explanation."

No one replied, and the men turned their heads and gazed vaguely at the walls.

"There are some who sham, and there are some who don't sham," he went on louder. "I've nothing to hide. I've left Deneulin's dirty shop, and tomorrow I'm going down to the Voreux with a dozen Belgians, who have been given me to lead because I'm held in esteem, and if anyone doesn't like that he can just say so, and we'll talk it over."

Then as the same contemptuous silence greeted his provocations, he turned furiously on Catherine.

"Will you drink, by God? Drink with me to the confusion of all the dirty beasts who refuse to work."

She drank, but with so trembling a hand that the two glasses struck to-

gether with a tinkling sound. He had now pulled out of his pocket a handful of silver, which he exhibited with drunken ostentation, saying that he had earned that with his sweat and that he defied the shamblers to show ten sous. The attitude of his mates exasperated him, and he began to come to direct insults.

"Then it is at night that the moles come out? The police have to go to sleep before we meet the brigands."

Etienne had risen, very calm and resolute.

"Listen, you annoy me. Yes, you are a spy; your money still stinks of some treachery. You've sold yourself, and it disgusts me to touch your skin. No matter, I'm your man. It is quite time that one of us did for the other."

Chaval clenched his fists.

"Come along then, cowardly dog! I must call you so to warm you up. You all alone—I'm quite willing—and you shall pay for all the bloody tricks that have been played on me."

With suppliant arms Catherine advanced between them. But they had no need to repel her, she felt the necessity of the battle and slowly drew back of her own accord. Standing against the wall, she remained silent, so paralyzed with anguish that she no longer shivered, her large eyes gazing at these two men who were going to kill each other over her.

Mme Rasseneur simply removed the glasses from the counter for fear that they might be broken. Then she sat down again on the bench without showing any improper curiosity. But the two old mates could not be left to murder each other like this. Rasseneur persisted in interfering, and Souvarine had to take him by the shoulder and lead him back to the table, saying:

"It doesn't concern you. There is one of them too many, and the strongest must live."

Without waiting for the attack Chaval's fists were already dealing blows at space. He was the taller of the two, and his blows swung about, aiming at the face, with furious cutting movements of both arms, one after the other, as though he were maneuvering a couple of sabers. And he went on talking, playing to the gallery with volleys of abuse, which served to excite him.

"Ah, you damned devil, I'll have your nose! I'll do for your bloody nose! Just let me get at your chops, you whore's looking glass; I'll make a hash for the bloody swine, and then we shall see if the strumpets will run after you!"

In silence and with clenched teeth Etienne gathered up his small figure, according to the rules of the game, protecting his chest and face by both fists, and he watched and let them fly like springs released, with terrible straight blows.

At first they did each other little damage. The whirling and blustering blows of the one, the cool watchfulness of the other, prolonged the struggle. A chair was overthrown; their panting respiration was heard, while their faces became red and swollen as from an interior fire which flamed out from the clear holes of their eyes.

"Played!" yelled Chaval. "Trumps on your carcass!"

In fact, his fist, working like a flail, had struck his adversary's shoulder. Etienne restrained a groan of pain, and the only sound that was heard was the dull bruising of the muscles. Etienne replied with a straight blow to Chaval's chest, which would have knocked him out, had he not saved himself by his constant goatlike leaps. The blow, however, caught him on the left flank with such effect that he tottered, momentarily winded. He became furious on feeling his arm grow limp with pain and rushed like a wild beast, aiming at his adversary's belly with his heel.

"Have at your guts!" he stammered in a choked voice. "I'll pull them out and unwind them for you!"

Etienne avoided the blow, so indignant at this infraction of the laws of fair fighting that he broke silence.

"Hold your tongue, brute! And no feet, by God, or I take a chair and bash you with it!"

Then the struggle became serious. Rasseneur was disgusted and would again have interfered, but a severe look from his wife held him back: had not two customers a right to settle an affair in the house? He simply placed himself before the fireplace, for fear lest they should tumble over into it. Souvarine, in his quiet way, had rolled a cigarette, but he forgot to light it. Catherine was motionless against the wall; only her hands had unconsciously risen to her waist and with constant fidgeting movements were twisting and tearing at the stuff of her dress. She was striving as hard as possible not to cry out and so, perhaps, kill one of them by declaring her preference, but she was, too, so distracted that she did not even know which she preferred.

Chaval, who was bathed in sweat and striking at random, soon became exhausted. In spite of his anger Etienne continued to cover himself, parrying nearly all the blows, a few of which grazed him. His ear was split; a fingernail had torn away a piece of his neck, and this so smarted that he swore in his turn as he drove out one of his terrible straight blows. Once more Chaval saved his chest by a leap, but he had lowered himself, and the fist reached his face, smashing his nose and crushing one eye. Immediately a jet of blood came from his nostrils, and his eye was swollen and bluish. Blinded by this red flood and dazed by the shock to his skull, the wretch was beating the air with his arms at random, when another blow, striking him at last full in the chest, finished him. There was a crunching sound; he fell on his back with a heavy thud, as when a sack of plaster is emptied.

Etienne waited.

"Get up! If you want another we'll begin again."

Without replying Chaval, after a few minutes' stupefaction, moved on the ground and stretched his limbs. He gathered himself up with difficulty, resting for a moment on his knees in a ball, doing something with his hand in the bottom of his pocket, which could not be observed. Then when he was up he rushed forward again, his throat swelling with a savage yell.

But Catherine had seen, and in spite of herself a loud cry came from her heart, like the avowal of a preference she had herself been ignorant of:

"Take care! He's got his knife!"

Etienne had only time to parry the first blow with his arm. His woolen jacket was cut by the thick blade, one of those blades fastened by a copper ferrule into a boxwood handle. He had already seized Chaval's wrist, and a terrible struggle began, for he felt that he would be lost if he let go, while the other shook his arm in the effort to free it and strike. The weapon was gradually lowered as their stiffened limbs grew fatigued. Etienne twice felt the cold sensation of the steel against his skin, and he had to make a supreme effort, so crushing the other's wrist that the knife slipped from his hand. Both of them had fallen to the earth, and it was Etienne who snatched it up, brandishing it in his turn. He held Chaval down beneath his knee and threatened to slit his throat open.

"Ah, traitor! By God, you've come to it now!"

He felt an awful voice within, deafening him. It arose from his bowels and was beating in his head like a hammer, a sudden mania of murder, a need to taste blood. Never before had the crisis so shaken him. He was not drunk, however, and he struggled against the hereditary disease with the despairing shudder of a man who is mad with lust and struggles on the verge of rape. At last he conquered himself; he threw the knife behind him, stammering in a hoarse voice:

"Get up—off you go!"

This time Rasseneur had rushed forward but without quite daring to venture between them, for fear of catching a nasty blow. He did not want anyone to be murdered in his house and was so angry that his wife, sitting erect at the counter, remarked to him that he always cried out too soon. Souvarine, who had nearly caught the knife in his legs, decided to light his cigarette. Was it then all over? Catherine was looking on stupidly at the two men who were unexpectedly both living.

"Off you go!" repeated Etienne. "Off you go, or I'll do for you!"

Chaval arose and with the back of his hand wiped away the blood which continued to flow from his nose; with jaw smeared red and bruised eye he went away, trailing his feet, furious at his defeat. Catherine mechanically followed him. Then he turned round, and his hatred broke out in a flood of filth.

"No, no! Since you want him, sleep with him, dirty jade! And don't put your bloody feet in my place again if you care about your skin!"

He violently banged the door. There was deep silence in the warm room; the low crackling of the coal was alone heard. On the ground there only remained the overturned chair and a rain of blood which the sand on the floor was drinking up.

CHAPTER IV

WHEN they came out of Rasseneur's, Etienne and Catherine walked on in silence. The thaw was beginning, a slow, cold thaw which stained the snow without melting it. In the livid sky a full moon could be faintly seen behind great clouds, black rags driven furiously by a tempestuous wind far above, and on the earth no breath was stirring; nothing could be heard but drippings from the roofs, the falling of white lumps with a soft thud.

Etienne was embarrassed by this woman who had been given to him, and in his disquiet he could find nothing to say. The idea of taking her with him to hide at Réquillart seemed absurd. He had proposed to lead her back to the settlement, to her parents' house, but she had refused in terror. No, no! Anything rather than be a burden on them once more after having behaved so badly to them! And neither of them spoke any more; they tramped on at random through the roads which were becoming rivers of mud. At first they went down toward the Voreux; then they turned to the right and passed between the pit bank and the canal.

"But you'll have to sleep somewhere," he said at last. "Now if I only had a room I could easily take you—"

But a curious spasm of timidity interrupted him. The past came back to him, their old longings for each other and the delicacies and the shames which had prevented them from coming together. Did he still desire her that he felt so troubled, gradually warmed at the heart by a fresh longing? The recollection of the blows she had dealt him at Gaston-Marie now attracted him instead of filling him with spite. And he was surprised; the idea of taking her to Réquillart was becoming quite natural and easy to execute.

"Now come, decide; where would you like me to take you? You must hate me very much to refuse to come with me!"

She was following him slowly, delayed by the painful slipping of her *sabots* into the ruts, and without raising her head she murmured:

"I have enough trouble, good God! Don't give me any more. What good would it do us, what you ask, now that I have a lover and you have a woman yourself?"

She meant Mouquette. She believed that he still went with this girl, as the rumor ran for the last fortnight, and when he swore to her that it was not so she shook her head, for she remembered the evening when she had seen them eagerly kissing each other.

"Isn't it a pity, all this nonsense?" he whispered, stopping. "We might understand each other so well."

She shuddered slightly and replied:

"Never mind; you've nothing to be sorry for. You don't lose much. If you knew what a trumpery thing I am—no bigger than two hap'orth of butter, so ill made that I shall never become a woman, sure enough!"

And she went on freely accusing herself, as though the long delay of her puberty had been her own fault. In spite of the man whom she had had, this lessened her, placed her among the urchins. One has some excuse, at any rate, when one can produce a child.

"My poor little one!" said Etienne with deep pity, in a very low voice.

They were at the foot of the pit bank, hidden in the shadow of the enormous pile. An inky cloud was just then passing over the moon; they could no longer even distinguish their faces. Their breaths were mingled; their lips were seeking each other for that kiss which had tormented them with desire for months. But suddenly the moon reappeared, and they saw the sentinel above them, at the top of the rocks white with light, standing out erect on the Voreux.

And before they had kissed an emotion of modesty separated them, that old modesty in which there was something of anger, a vague repugnance and much friendship. They set out again heavily, up to their ankles in mud.

"Then it's settled. You don't want to have anything to do with me?" asked Etienne.

"No," she said. "You after Chaval, and after you another, eh? No, that disgusts me; it doesn't give me any pleasure. What's the use of doing it?"

They were silent and walked some hundred paces without exchanging a word.

"But anyhow, do you know where to go to?" he said again. "I can't leave you out in a night like this."

She replied simply:

"I'm going back. Chaval is my man. I have nowhere else to sleep but with him."

"But he will beat you to death."

There was silence again. She had shrugged her shoulders in resignation. He would beat her, and when he was tired of beating her he would stop. Was not that better than to roam the streets like a vagabond? Then she was used to blows; she said, to console herself, that eight out of ten girls were no better off than she was. If her lover married her someday it would, all the same, be very nice of him.

Etienne and Catherine were moving mechanically toward Montsou, and as they came nearer their silences grew longer. It was as though they had never been together. He could find no argument to convince her, in spite of the deep vexation which he felt at seeing her go back to Chaval. His heart was breaking; he had nothing better to offer than an existence of wretchedness and flight, a night with no tomorrow should a soldier's bullet go through his head. Perhaps, after all, it was wiser to suffer what he was suffering rather than risk a fresh suffering. So he led her back to her lover's, with sunken head, and made no protest when she stopped him on the main road at the corner of the yards, twenty meters from the *Estaminet Piquette*, saying:

"Don't come any farther. If he sees you it will only make things worse."

Eleven o'clock struck at the church. The *estaminet* was closed, but gleams came through the cracks.

"Good-by," she murmured.

She had given him her hand; he kept it, and she had to draw it away painfully with a slow effort to leave him. Without turning her head she went in through the little latched door. But he did not turn away, standing at the same place with his eyes on the house, anxious as to what was passing within. He listened trembling lest he should hear the cries of a beaten woman. The house remained black and silent; he only saw a light appear at a first-story window, and as this window opened and he recognized the thin shadow that was leaning over the road, he came near.

Catherine then whispered very low:

"He's not come back. I'm going to bed. Please go away."

Etienne went off. The thaw was increasing; a regular shower was falling

from the roofs; a moist sweat flowed down the walls, the palings, the whole confused mass of this industrial district lost in night. At first he turned toward Réquillart, sick with fatigue and sadness, having no other desire except to disappear under the earth and to be annihilated there. Then the idea of the Voreux occurred to him again. He thought of the Belgian workmen who were going down, of his mates at the settlement, exasperated against the soldiers and resolved not to tolerate strangers in their pit. And he passed again along the canal through the puddles of melted snow.

As he stood once more near the pit bank the moon was shining brightly. He raised his eyes and gazed at the sky. The clouds were galloping by, whipped on by the strong wind which was blowing up there, but they were growing white and raveling out thinly with the misty transparency of troubled water over the moon's face. They succeeded each other so rapidly that the moon, veiled at moments, constantly reappeared in limpid clearness.

With gaze full of this pure brightness Etienne was lowering his head, when a spectacle on the summit of the pit bank attracted his attention. The sentinel, stiffened by cold, was walking up and down, taking twenty-five paces toward Marchiennes and then returning toward Montsou. The white glitter of his bayonet could be seen above his black silhouette, which stood out clearly against the pale sky. But what interested the young man was that behind the cabin where Bonnemort used to take shelter on tempestuous nights was a moving shadow—a crouching beast in ambush—which he immediately recognized as Jeanlin, with his long, flexible spine like a marten's. The sentinel could not see him. That brigand of a child was certainly preparing some practical joke, for he was still furious against the soldiers and asking when they were going to be freed from these murderers who had been sent here with guns to kill people.

For a moment Etienne thought of calling him to prevent the execution of some stupid trick. The moon was hidden. He had seen him draw himself up, ready to spring, but the moon reappeared, and the child remained crouching. At every turn the sentinel came as far as the cabin, then turned his back and walked in the opposite direction. And suddenly, as a cloud threw its shadow, Jeanlin leaped onto the soldier's shoulders with the great bound of a savage cat and, gripping him with his claws, buried his large open knife in his throat. The horsehair collar resisted; he had to apply both hands to the handle and hang on with all the weight of his body. He had often bled fowl which he had found behind farms. It was so rapid that there was only a stifled cry in the night, while the musket fell with the sound of old iron. Already the moon was shining again.

Motionless with stupor, Etienne was still gazing. A shout had been choked in his chest. Above the pit bank was vacant; no shadow was any longer visible against the wild flight of clouds. He ran up and found Jeanlin on all fours before the corpse, which was lying back with extended arms. Beneath the limpid light the red trousers and gray overcoat contrasted harshly with the snow. Not a drop of blood had flowed; the knife was still in the throat up to the handle. With a furious, unreasoning blow of the fist he knocked the child down beside the body.

"What have you done that for?" he stammered wildly.

Jeanlin picked himself up and rested on his hands, with a feline movement of his thin spine; his large ears, his green eyes, his prominent jaws, were quivering and aflame with the shock of his deadly blow.

"By God, why have you done this?"

"I don't know; I wanted to."

He persisted in this reply. For three days he had wanted to. It tormented him; it made his head ache behind his ears, because he thought about it so much. Need one be so particular with these damned soldiers who were worrying the colliers in their own homes? Of the violent speeches he had heard in the forest, the cries of destruction and death shouted among the pits, five or six words had remained with him, and these he repeated like a street urchin playing at revolution. And he knew no more; no one had pushed him on; it had come to him by himself, just as the desire to steal onions from a field came to him.

Startled at this obscure growth of crime in the recesses of this childish brain, Etienne again pushed him away with a kick, like an unconscious animal. He trembled lest the guard at the Voreux had heard the sentinel's stifled cry and looked toward the pit every time the moon was uncovered. But nothing stirred, and he bent down, felt the hands that were gradually becoming icy and listened to the heart, which had stopped beneath the overcoat. Only the bone handle of the knife could be seen with the motto on it, the simple word "Amour," engraved in black letters.

His eyes went from the throat to the face. Suddenly he recognized the little soldier; it was Jules, the recruit with whom he had talked one morning. And deep pity came over him in front of this fair, gentle face, marked with freckles. The blue eyes, wide open, were gazing at the sky with that fixed gaze with which he had before seen him searching the horizon for the country of his birth. Where was it, that Plogof which had appeared to him beneath the dazzling sun? Over there, over there! The sea was moaning afar on this tempestuous night. That wind passing above had perhaps swept over the moors. Two women perhaps were standing there, the mother and the sister, clutching their wind-blown coifs, gazing as if they would see what was now happening to the little fellow through the leagues which separated them. They would always wait for him now. What an abominable thing it is for poor devils to kill each other for the sake of the rich!

But this corpse had to be disposed of. Etienne at first thought of throwing it into the canal but was deterred from this by the certainty that it would be found there. His anxiety became extreme; every minute was of importance; what decision should he take? He had a sudden inspiration: if he could carry the body as far as Réquillart he would be able to bury it there forever.

"Come here," he said to Jeanlin.

The child was suspicious.

"No, you want to beat me. And then I have business. Good night."

In fact, he had given a rendezvous to Bébert and Lydie in a hiding place, a hole arranged under the wood supply at the Voreux. It had been arranged to

sleep out so as to be there if the Belgians' bones were to be broken by stoning when they went down the pit.

"Listen!" repeated Etienne. "Come here, or I shall call the soldiers, who will cut your head off."

And as Jeanlin was making up his mind, he rolled his handkerchief and bound the soldier's neck tightly, without drawing out the knife, so as to prevent the blood from flowing. The snow was melting; on the soil there was neither a red patch nor the footmarks of a struggle.

"Take the legs!"

Jeanlin took the legs while Frienne seized the shoulders after having fastened the gun behind his back, and then they both slowly descended the pit bank, trying to avoid rolling any rocks down. Fortunately the moon was hidden. But as they passed along the canal it reappeared brightly, and it was a miracle that the guard did not see them. Silently they hastened on, hindered by the swinging of the corpse and obliged to place it on the ground every hundred meters. At the corner of the Réquillart lane they heard a sound which froze them with terror, and they only had time to hide behind a wall to avoid a patrol. Farther on a man came across them, but he was drunk and moved away, abusing them. At last they reached the old pit, bathed in perspiration and so exhausted that their teeth were chattering.

Etienne had guessed that it would not be easy to get the soldier down the ladder shaft. It was an awful task. First of all Jeanlin, standing above, had to let the body slide down, while Etienne, hanging onto the bushes, had to accompany it to enable it to free the first two ladders where the rungs were broken. Afterward at every ladder he had to perform the same maneuver over again, going down first, then receiving the body in his arms; and he had thus, down thirty ladders, two hundred and ten meters, to feel it constantly falling over him. The gun scraped his spine; he had not allowed the child to go for the candle end, which he preserved avariciously. What was the use? The light would only embarrass them in this narrow tube. When they arrived at the pit eye, however, out of breath, he sent the youngster for the candle. He then sat down and waited for him in the darkness, near the body, with heart beating violently. As soon as Jeanlin reappeared with the light Etienne consulted with him, for the child had explored these old workings, even to the cracks through which men could not pass. They set out again, dragging the dead body for nearly a kilometer, through a maze of ruinous galleries. At last the roof became low and they found themselves kneeling beneath a sandy rock supported by half-broken planks. It was a sort of long chest in which they laid the little soldier, as in a coffin; they placed his gun by his side, then with vigorous blows of their heels they broke the timber at the risk of being buried themselves. Immediately the rock gave way, and they scarcely had time to crawl back on their elbows and knees. When Etienne returned, seized by the desire to look once more, the roof was still falling in, slowly crushing the body beneath its enormous weight. And then there was nothing more left, nothing but the vast mass of the earth.

Jeanlin, having returned to his own corner, his little cavern of villainy,

was stretching himself out on the hay, overcome by weariness and murmuring: "Heigho! The brats must wait for me; I'm going to have an hour's sleep."

Etienne had blown out the candle, of which there was only a small end left. He also was worn out, but he was not sleepy; painful nightmare thoughts were beating like hammers in his skull. Only one at last remained, torturing him and fatiguing him with a question to which he could not reply: Why had he not struck Chaval when he held him beneath the knife? And why had this child just killed a soldier whose very name he did not know? It shook his revolutionary beliefs, the courage to kill, the right to kill. Was he, then, a coward? In the hay the child had begun snoring, the snoring as of a drunken man, as if he were sleeping off the intoxication of his murder. Etienne was disgusted and irritated; it hurt him to know that the boy was there and to hear him. Suddenly he started; a breath of fear passed over his face. A light rustling, a sob, seemed to him to have come out of the depths of the earth. The image of the little soldier, lying over there with his gun beneath the rocks, froze his back and made his hair stand up. It was idiotic; the whole mine seemed to be filled with voices; he had to light the candle again and only grew calm on seeing the emptiness of the galleries by this pale light.

For another quarter of an hour he reflected, still absorbed in the same struggle, his eyes fixed on the burning wick. But there was a spluttering; the wick was going out, and everything fell back into darkness. He shuddered again; he could have boxed Jeanlin's ears to keep him from snoring so loudly. The neighborhood of the child became so unbearable that he escaped, tormented by the need for fresh air, hastening through the galleries and up the passage, as though he could hear a shadow, panting, at his heels.

Up above, in the midst of the ruins of Réquillart, Etienne was at last able to breathe freely. Since he dared not kill, it was for him to die, and this idea of death, which had already touched him, came again and fixed itself in his head as a last hope. To die bravely, to die for the revolution, that would end everything, would settle his account, good or bad, and prevent him from thinking more. If the men attacked the Borains he would be in the first rank and would have a good chance of getting a bad blow. It was with a firmer step that he returned to prowling around the Voreux. Two o'clock struck, and the loud noise of voices was coming from the captain's room, where the guards who watched over the pit were posted. The disappearance of the sentinel had overcome the guards with surprise; they had gone to arouse the captain, and after a careful examination of the place they concluded that it must be a case of desertion. Hiding in the shade, Etienne recollected this Republican captain of whom the little soldier had spoken. Who knows if he might not be persuaded to pass over to the people's side! The troop would raise their rifles, and that would be the signal for a massacre of the bourgeois. A new dream took possession of him; he thought no more of dying but remained for hours with his feet in the mud and a drizzle from the thaw falling on his shoulders, filled by the feverish hope that victory was still possible.

Up to five o'clock he watched for the Borains. Then he perceived that the company had cunningly arranged that they should sleep at the Voreux. The

descent had begun, and the few strikers from the Deux-Cent-Quarante settlement who had been posted as scouts had not yet warned their mates. It was he who told them of the trick, and they set out running, while he waited behind the pit bank on the towing path. Six o'clock struck, and the earthy sky was growing pale and lighting up with a reddish dawn, when the Abbé Ranvier came along a path, holding up his cassock above his thin legs. Every Monday he went to say an early Mass at a convent chapel on the other side of the pit.

"Good morning, my friend," he shouted in a loud voice after staring at the young man with his flaming eyes.

But Etienne did not reply. Far away between the Voreux platforms he had just seen a woman pass, and he rushed forward anxiously, for he thought he recognized Catherine. Since midnight Catherine had been walking about the thawing roads. Chaval, on coming back and finding her in bed, had knocked her out with a blow. He shouted to her to go out at once by the door if she did not wish to go by the window, and scarcely dressed, in tears and bruised by kicks in her legs, she had been obliged to go down, pushed outside by a final thrust. This sudden separation dazed her, and she sat down on a stone, looking up at the house, still expecting that he would call her back. It was not possible; he would surely look for her and tell her to come back when he saw her thus shivering and abandoned, with no one to take her in.

At the end of two hours she made up her mind, dying of cold and as motionless as a dog thrown into the street. She left Montsou, then retraced her steps but dared neither to call from the pathway nor to knock at the door. At last she went off by the main road to the right with the idea of going to the settlement, to her parents' house. But when she reached it she was seized by such shame that she rushed away along the gardens for fear of being recognized by someone, in spite of the heavy sleep which weighed on all eyes behind the closed shutters. And after that she wandered about, frightened at the slightest noise, trembling lest she should be seized and led away as a strumpet to that house at Marchiennes, the threat of which had haunted her like a nightmare for months. Twice she stumbled against the Voreux, but terrified at the loud voices of the guard, she ran away, out of breath, looking behind her to see if she were being pursued. The Réquillart lane was always full of drunken men; she went back to it, however, with the vague hope of meeting there him she had repelled a few hours earlier.

Chaval had to go down that morning, and this thought brought Catherine again toward the pit, though she felt that it would be useless to speak to him: all was over between them. There was no work going on at Jean-Bart, and he had sworn to kill her if she worked again at the Voreux, where he feared that she would compromise him. So what was to be done? To go elsewhere, to die of hunger, to yield beneath the blows of every man who might pass? She dragged herself along, tottering amid the ruts with aching legs and mud up to her spine. The thaw had now filled the streets with a flood of mire. She waded through it, still walking, not daring to look for a stone to sit on.

Day appeared. Catherine had just recognized the back of Chaval, who was cautiously going round the pit bank, when she noticed Lydie and Bébert putting

their noses out of their hiding place beneath the wood supply. They had passed the night there in ambush without going home, since Jeanlin's order was to await him, and while this latter was sleeping off the drunkenness of his murder at Réquillart, the two children were lying in each other's arms to keep warm. The wind blew between the planks of chestnut and oak, and they rolled themselves up as in some woodcutter's abandoned hut. Lydie did not dare to speak aloud the sufferings of a small beaten woman, any more than Bébert found courage to complain of the captain's blows which made his cheeks swell, but the captain was really abusing his power, risking their bones in mad marauding expeditions while refusing to share the booty. Their hearts rose in revolt, and they had at last embraced each other in spite of his orders, careless of that box of the ears from the invisible with which he had threatened them. It never came, so they went on kissing each other softly, with no idea of anything else, putting into that caress the passion they had long struggled against—the whole of their martyred and tender natures. All night through they had thus kept each other warm, so happy, at the bottom of this secret hole, that they could not remember that they had ever been so happy before—not even at Sainte-Barbe, when they had eaten fritters and drunk wine.

The sudden sound of a bugle made Catherine start. She raised herself and saw the Voreux guards taking up their arms. Etienne arrived, running; Bébert and Lydie jumped out of their hiding place with a leap. And over there, beneath the growing daylight, a band of men and women were coming from the settlement, gesticulating wildly with anger.

CHAPTER V

ALL THE ENTRANCES to the Voreux had been closed, and the sixty soldiers, with grounded arms, were barring the only door left free, that leading to the receiving room by a narrow staircase into which opened the captain's room and the shed. The men had been drawn up in two lines against the brick wall, so that they could not be attacked from behind.

At first the band of miners from the settlement kept at a distance. They were some thirty at most and talked together in a violent and confused way.

Maheude, who had arrived first, with disheveled hair beneath a handkerchief knotted on in haste and having Estelle asleep in her arms, repeated in feverish tones:

"Don't let anyone in or anyone out! Shut them all in there!"

Maheu approved, and just then Father Mouque arrived from Réquillart. They wanted to prevent him from passing. But he protested; he said that his horses ate their hay all the same and cared precious little about a revolution. Besides, there was a horse dead, and they were waiting for him to draw it up. Etienne freed the old groom, and the soldiers allowed him to go to the shaft. A quarter of an hour later, as the band of strikers, which had gradually enlarged, was becoming threatening, a large door opened on the ground floor and some men

appeared drawing out the dead beast, a miserable mass of flesh still fastened in the rope net; they left it in the midst of the puddles of melting snow. The surprise was so great that no one prevented the men from returning and barricading the door afresh. They all recognized the horse, with his head bent back and stiff against the plank. Whispers ran around:

"It's Trompette, isn't it? It's Trompette."

It was, in fact, Trompette. Ever since his descent he had never become acclimatized. He remained melancholy, with no taste for his task, as though tortured by regret for the light. In vain Bataille, the *doyen* of the mine, would rub him with his ribs in his friendly way, softly biting his neck to impart to him a little of the resignation gained in his ten years beneath the earth. These caresses increased his melancholy; his skin quivered beneath the confidences of the comrade who had grown old in darkness; and both of them, whenever they met and snorted together, seemed to be grieving—the old one, that he could no longer remember; the young one, that he could never forget. At the stable they were neighbors at the manger and lived with lowered heads, breathing in each other's nostrils, exchanging a constant dream of daylight, visions of green grass, of white roads, of infinite yellow light. Then when Trompette, bathed in sweat, lay in agony in his litter, Bataille had smelled at him despairingly with short sniffs like sobs. He felt that he was growing cold; the mine was taking from him his last joy, that friend fallen from above, fresh with good odors, who recalled to him his youth in the open air. And he had broken his tether, neighing with fear, when he perceived that the other no longer stirred.

Mouque had indeed warned the head captain a week ago. But much they troubled about a sick horse at such a time as this! These gentlemen did not at all like moving the horses. Now, however, they had to make up their minds to take him out. The evening before the groom had spent an hour with two men, tying up Trompette. They harnessed Bataille to bring him to the shaft. The old horse slowly pulled, dragging his dead comrade through so narrow a gallery that he could only shake himself at the risk of taking the skin off. And he tossed his head, listening to the grazing sound of the carcass as it went to the knacker's yard. At the pit eye, when he was unharnessed, he followed with his melancholy eye the preparations for the ascent—the body pushed onto the crossbars over the sump, the net fastened beneath a cage. At last the porters rang meat; he lifted his neck to see it go up, at first softly, then at once lost in the darkness, flown up forever to the top of that black hole. And he remained with neck stretched out, his vague beast's memory perhaps recalling the things of the earth. But it was all over; he would never see his comrade again, and he himself would thus be tied up in a pitiful bundle on the day when he would ascend up there. His legs began to tremble; the fresh air which came from the distant country choked him, and he seemed intoxicated when he went heavily back to the stable.

At the surface the colliers stood gloomily before Trompette's carcass. A woman said in a low voice:

"Another man that may go down if it likes!"

But a new flood arrived from the settlement, and Levaque, who was at the head, followed by his wife and Bouteloup, shouted:

"Kill them, those Borains! No blacklegs here! Kill them! Kill them!"

All rushed forward, and Etienne had to stop them. He went up to the captain, a tall, thin young man of scarcely twenty-eight years, with a despairing, resolute face. He explained things to him; he tried to win him over, watching the effect of his words. What was the good of risking a useless massacre? Was not justice on the side of the miners? They were all brothers, and they ought to understand one another. When he came to use the word "republic" the captain made a nervous movement, but he preserved his military stiffness and said suddenly:

"Keep off! Do not force me to do my duty."

Three times over Etienne tried again. Behind him his mates were growling. The report ran that M. Hennebeau was at the pit, and they talked of letting him down by the neck to see if he would hew his coal himself. But it was a false report; only Négrel and Dansaert were there. They both showed themselves for a moment at a window of the receiving room; the head captain stood in the background, rather out of countenance since his adventure with Pieronne, while the engineer bravely looked round on the crowd with his bright little eyes, smiling with that sneering contempt in which he enveloped men and things generally. Hooting arose, and they disappeared. And in their place only Souvarine's pale face was seen. He was just then on duty; he had not left his engine for a single day since the strike began, no longer talking, more and more absorbed by a fixed idea, which seemed to be shining like steel in the depths of his pale eyes.

"Keep off!" repeated the captain loudly. "I wish to hear nothing. My orders are to guard the pit, and I shall guard it. And do not press onto my men, or I shall know how to drive you back."

In spite of his firm voice he was growing pale with increasing anxiety, as the flood of miners continued to swell. He would be relieved at midday, but fearing that he would not be able to hold out until then, he had sent a trammer from the pit to Montsou to ask for reinforcements.

Shouts had replied to him:

"Kill the blacklegs! Kill the Borains! We mean to be masters in our own place!"

Etienne drew back in despair. The end had come; there was nothing more except to fight and to die. And he ceased to hold back his mates. The mob moved up to the little troop. There were nearly four hundred of them, and the people from the neighboring settlements were all running up. They all shouted the same cry. Maheu and Levaque said furiously to the soldiers:

"Get off with you! We have nothing against you! Get off with you!"

"This doesn't concern you," said Maheude. "Let us attend to our own affairs."

And from behind, the Levaque woman added more violently:

"Must we eat you to get through? Just clear out of the bloody place!"

Even Lydie's shrill voice was heard. She had crammed herself in more closely, with Bébert, and was saying in a high voice:

"Oh, the pale-livered pigs!"

Catherine, a few paces off, was gazing and listening, stupefied by new scenes of violence, into the midst of which ill luck seemed to be always throwing her. Had she not suffered too much already? What fault had she committed then that misfortune would never give her any rest? The day before she had understood nothing of the fury of the strike; she thought that when one has one's share of blows it is useless to go and seek for more. And now her heart was swelling with hatred; she remembered what Etienne had often told her when they used to sit up; she tried to hear what he was now saying to the soldiers. He was treating them as mates; he reminded them that they also belonged to the people and that they ought to be on the side of the people, against those who took advantage of their wretchedness.

But a tremor ran through the crowd, and an old woman rushed up. It was Mother Brûlé, terrible in her leanness, with her neck and arms in the air, coming up at such a pace that the wisps of her gray hair blinded her.

"Ah, by God, here I am," she stammered, out of breath; "that traitor Pierron, who shut me up in the cellar!"

And without waiting she fell on the soldiers, her black mouth belching abuse. "Pack of scoundrels! Dirty scum! Ready to lick their masters' boots and only brave against poor people!"

Then the others joined her, and there were volleys of insults. A few, indeed, cried: "Hurrah for the soldiers! To the shaft with the officer!" But soon there was only one clamor: "Down with the red breeches!" These men, who had listened quietly, with motionless, mute faces, to the fraternal appeals and the friendly attempts to win them over, preserved the same stiff passivity beneath this hail of abuse. Behind them the captain had drawn his sword, and as the crowd pressed in on them more and more, threatening to crush them against the wall, he ordered them to present bayonets. They obeyed, and a double row of steel points was placed in front of the strikers' breasts.

"Ah, the bloody swine!" yelled Mother Brûlé, drawing back.

But already they were coming on again, in excited contempt of death. The women were throwing themselves forward, Maheude and the Levaque shouting:

"Kill us! Kill us then! We want our rights!"

Levaque, at the risk of getting cut, had seized three bayonets in his hands, shaking and pulling them in the effort to snatch them away. He twisted them in the strength of his fury, while Bouteloup, standing aside and annoyed at having followed his mate, quietly watched him.

"Just come and look here," said Maheu; "just look a bit if you are good chaps!"

And he opened his jacket and drew aside his shirt, showing his naked breast with his hairy skin tattooed by coal. He pressed on the bayonets, compelling the soldiers to draw back, terrible in his insolence and bravado. One

of them had pricked him in the chest, and he became like a madman, trying to make it enter deeper and to hear his ribs crack.

"Cowards, you don't dare! There are ten thousand behind us. Yes, you can kill us; there are ten thousand more of us to kill yet."

The position of the soldiers was becoming critical, for they had received strict orders not to make use of their weapons until the last extremity. And how were they to prevent these furious people from spitting themselves? Besides, the space was getting less; they were now pushed back against the wall, and it was impossible to draw farther back. Their little troop—a mere handful of men—opposed to the rising flood of miners, still held its own, however, and calmly executed the brief orders given by the captain. The latter, with keen eyes and nervously compressed lips, only feared lest they should be carried away by this abuse. Already a young sergeant, a tall, lean fellow whose thin mustache was bristling up, was moving his eyelids in a disquieting manner. Near him an old soldier with tanned skin and stripes won in twenty campaigns had grown pale when he saw his bayonet twisted like a straw. Another, doubtless a recruit, still smelling of the fields, became very red every time he heard himself called "scum" and "riffraff." And the violence did not cease, the stretched-out fists, the abominable words, the shovelfuls of accusations and threats which buffeted their faces. It required all the force of order to keep them thus, with mute faces, in the proud, gloomy silence of military discipline.

A collision seemed inevitable, when Captain Richomme appeared from behind the troop with his good-natured white head, overwhelmed by emotion. He spoke out loudly:

"By God, this is idiotic! Such tomfoolery can't go on!"

And he threw himself between the bayonets and the miners.

"Mates, listen to me. You know that I am an old workman and that I have always been one of you. Well, by God, I promise you that if they're not just with you I'm the man to go and say to the bosses how things lie. But this is too much; it does no good at all to howl bad names at these good fellows and try and get your bellies ripped up."

They listened, hesitating. But up above, unfortunately, little Négrel's short profile reappeared. He feared, no doubt, that he would be accused of sending a captain in place of venturing out himself, and he tried to speak. But his voice was lost in the midst of so frightful a tumult that he had to leave the window again, simply shrugging his shoulders. Richomme then found it vain to entreat them in his own name and to repeat that the thing must be arranged between mates; they repelled him, suspecting him. But he was obstinate and remained among them.

"By God, let them break my head as well as yours, for I don't leave you while you are so foolish!"

Etienne, whom he begged to help him in making them hear reason, made a gesture of powerlessness. It was too late; there were now more than five hundred of them. And besides the madmen who were rushing up to chase away the Borains, some came out of inquisitiveness or to joke and amuse

themselves over the battle. In the midst of one group, at some distance, Zacharie and Philomène were looking on as at a theater, so peacefully that they had brought their two children, Achille and Désirée. Another stream was arriving from Réquillart, including Mouquet and Mouquette. The former at once went on, grinning, to slap his friend Zacharie's shoulders, while Mouquette, in a very excited condition, rushed to the first rank of the evil-disposed.

Every minute, however, the captain looked down the Montsou road. The desired reinforcements had not arrived, and his sixty men could hold out no longer. At last it occurred to him to strike the imagination of the crowd, and he ordered his men to load. The soldiers executed the order, but the disturbance increased, the blustering and the mockery.

"Ah, these shamblers, they're going off to the target!" jeered the women, the Brûlé, the Levaque and the others.

Maheude, with her breast covered by the little body of Estelle, who was awake and crying, came so near that the sergeant asked her what she was going to do with that poor little brat.

"What the devil's that to do with you?" she replied. "Fire at it if you dare!"

The men shook their heads with contempt. None believed that they would fire on them.

"There are no balls in their cartridges," said Levaque.

"Are we Cossacks?" cried Maheu. "You don't fire against Frenchmen, by God!"

Others said that when people had been through the Crimean campaign they were not afraid of lead. And all continued to push themselves on to the rifles. If firing had begun at this moment the crowd would have been mowed down.

In the front rank Mouquette was choking with fury, thinking that the soldiers were going to gash the women's skins. She had spat out all her coarse words at them and could find no vulgarity low enough, when suddenly, having nothing left but that mortal offense with which to bombard the faces of the troop, she exhibited her backside. With both hands she raised her skirts, bent her back and expanded the enormous rotundity.

"Here, that's for you! And it's a lot too clean, you dirty blackguards!"

She ducked and butted so that each might have his share, repeating after each thrust:

"There's for the officer! There's for the sergeant! There's for the soldiers!"

A tempest of laughter arose; Bébert and Lydie were in convulsions; Etienne himself, in spite of his somber expectation, applauded this insulting nudity. All of them, the banterers as well as the infuriated, were now hooting the soldiers as though they had seen them stained by a splash of filth; Catherine only, standing aside on some old timber, remained silent with the blood at her heart, slowly carried away by the hatred that was rising within her.

But a hustling took place. To calm the excitement of his men the captain decided to make prisoners. With a leap Mouquette escaped, saving herself between the legs of her comrades. Three miners, Levaque and two others, were seized among the more violent and kept in sight at the other end of the

captain's room. Négrel and Dansaert, above, were shouting to the captain to come in and take refuge with them. He refused; he felt that these buildings with their doors without locks would be carried by assault and that he would undergo the shame of being disarmed. His little troop was already growling with impatience; it was impossible to flee before these wretches in sabots. The sixty, with their backs to the wall and their rifles loaded, again faced the mob.

At first there was a recoil, followed by deep silence; the strikers were astonished at this energetic stroke. Then a cry arose, calling for the prisoners, demanding their immediate release. Some voices said that they were being murdered in there. And without any attempt at concerted action, carried away by the same impulse, by the same desire for revenge, they all ran to the piles of bricks which stood near, those bricks for which the marly soil supplied the clay and which were baked on the spot. The children brought them one by one, and the women filled their skirts with them. Everyone soon had her ammunition at her feet, and the battle of stones began.

It was Mother Brûlé who set to first. She broke the bricks on the sharp edge of her knee, and with both hands she discharged the two fragments. The Levaque woman was almost pulling her shoulders out, being so large and soft that she had to come near to get her aim, in spite of Bouteloup's entreaties, and he dragged her back in the hope of being able to lead her away now that her husband had been taken off. They all grew excited, and Mouquette, tired of heating herself by breaking the bricks on her overfat thighs, preferred to throw them whole. Even the youngsters came into line, and Bébert showed Lydie how the brick ought to be sent, from under the elbow. It was a shower of enormous hailstones, producing low thuds. And suddenly, in the midst of these furies, Catherine was observed with her fists in the air, also brandishing half bricks and throwing them with all the force of her little arms. She could not say why; she was suffocating; she was dying of the desire to kill everybody. Would it not soon be done with, this cursed life of misfortune? She had had enough of it, beaten and hunted away by her man, wandering about like a lost dog in the mud of the roads, without being able to ask a crust from her father, who was starving like herself. Things never seemed to get better; they were getting worse ever since she could remember. And she broke the bricks and threw them before her with the one idea of sweeping everything away, her eyes so blinded that she could not even see whose jaws she might be crushing.

Etienne, who had remained in front of the soldiers, nearly had his skull broken. His ear was grazed and, turning round, he started when he realized that the brick had come from Catherine's feverish hands, but at the risk of being killed he remained where he was, gazing at her. Many others also forgot themselves there, absorbed in the battle, with empty hands. Mouque criticized the blows as though he were looking on at a game of *bouchon*. Oh, that was well struck! And that other, no luck! He joked and with his elbow pushed Zacharie, who was squabbling with Philomène because he had boxed Achille's and Désirée's ears, refusing to put them on his back so that they could see. There were spectators crowded all along the road. And at the top of the

slope, near the entrance to the settlement, old Bonnemort appeared, resting on his stick, motionless against the rust-colored sky.

As soon as the first bricks were thrown Captain Richomme had again placed himself between the soldiers and the miners. He was entreating the one party, exhorting the other party, careless of danger, in such despair that large tears were flowing from his eyes. It was impossible to hear his words in the midst of the tumult; only his large gray mustache could be seen moving.

But the hail of bricks came faster; the men were joining in, following the example of the women.

Then Maheude noticed that Maheu was standing behind with empty hands and somber air.

"What's up with you?" she shouted. "Are you a coward? Are you going to let your mates be carried off to prison? Ah, if only I hadn't got this child, you would see!"

Estelle, who was clinging to her neck, screaming, prevented her from joining Mother Brûlé and the others. And as her man did not seem to hear, she kicked some bricks against his legs.

"By God, will you take that? Must I spit in your face before people to get your spirits up?"

Becoming very red, he broke some bricks and threw them. She lashed him on, dazing him, shouting behind him cries of death, stifling her daughter against her breast with the spasm of her arms, and he still moved forward until he was opposite the guns.

Beneath this shower of stones the little troop was disappearing. Fortunately they struck too high, and the wall was riddled. What was to be done? The idea of going in, of turning back, for a moment turned the captain's pale face purple, but it was no longer even possible; they would be torn to pieces at the least movement. A brick had just broken the peak of his cap; drops of blood were running down his forehead. Many of his men were wounded, and he felt that they were losing self-control in that unbridled instinct of self-defense when obedience to leaders ceases. The sergeant had uttered a "By God!" for his left shoulder had nearly been put out and his flesh bruised by a shock like the blow of a washerwoman's beetle against linen. Grazed twice over, the recruit had his thumb smashed, while his right knee was burning. Were they to let themselves be worried much longer? A stone having bounded back and struck the old soldier with the stripes beneath the belly, his cheeks turned green and his weapon trembled as he stretched it out at the end of his lean arms. Three times the captain was on the point of ordering them to fire. He was choked by anguish; an endless struggle during the last few minutes was stirring up ideas and duties within him, all his beliefs as a man and as a soldier. The rain of bricks increased, and he opened his mouth and was about to shout "Fire!" when the guns went off of themselves, three shots at first, then five, then the roll of a volley, then one by itself, sometime afterward in the deep silence.

There was stupefaction on all sides. They had fired, and the gaping crowd stood motionless, as yet unable to believe it. But heart-rending cries arose

while the bugle was sounding to cease firing. And there was a mad panic, the rush of cattle filled with grapeshot, a wild flight through the mud. Bébert and Lydie had fallen one on top of the other at the first three shots, the little girl struck in the face, the boy wounded beneath the left shoulder. She was crushed and never stirred again. But he moved, seized her with both arms in the convulsion of his agony, as if he wanted to take her again, as he had taken her at the bottom of the black hiding place where they had spent the past night. And Jeanlin, who just then ran up from Réquillart, still half asleep, kicking about in the midst of the smoke, saw him embrace his little wife and die.

The five other shots had brought down Mother Brûlé and Captain Richomme. Struck in the back as he was entreating his mates, he had fallen onto his knees and, slipping onto one hip, he was groaning on the ground with eyes still full of tears. The old woman, whose breast had been opened, had fallen back stiff and crackling, like a bundle of dry fagots, stammering one last oath in the gurgling of blood.

But then the volley swept the field, mowing down the inquisitive groups who were laughing at the battle a hundred paces off. A ball entered Mouquet's mouth and threw him down with fractured skull at the feet of Zacharie and Philomène, whose two youngsters were splashed with red drops. At the same moment Mouquette received two balls in the belly. She had seen the soldiers shoulder arms, and in an instinctive movement of her good nature she had thrown herself in front of Catherine, shouting out to her to take care; she uttered a loud cry and fell onto her back, overturned by the shock. Etienne ran up, wishing to raise her and take her away, but with a gesture she said it was all over. Then she groaned but without ceasing to smile at both of them, as though she were glad to see them together now that she was going away.

All seemed to be over, and the hurricane of balls was lost in the distance as far as the frontages of the settlement, when the last shot, isolated and delayed, was fired.

Maheu, struck in the heart, turned round and fell with his face down into the puddle black with coal. Maheude leaned down in stupefaction.

"Eh! Old man, get up. It's nothing, is it?"

Her hands were engaged with Estelle, whom she had to put under one arm in order to turn her man's head.

"Say something! Where are you bad?"

His eyes were vacant, and his mouth was slavered with bloody foam. She understood: he was dead. Then she remained seated in the mud with her daughter under her arm like a bundle, gazing at her old man with a besotted air.

The pit was free. With a nervous movement the captain had taken off and then put on his cap, struck by a stone; he preserved his pallid stiffness in face of the disaster of his life, while his men with mute faces were reloading. The frightened faces of Négrel and Dansaert could be seen at the window of the receiving room. Souvarine was behind them with a deep wrinkle on his forehead, as though the nail of his fixed idea had printed itself there threateningly. On the other side of the horizon, at the edge of the plain, Bonnemort had not

moved, supported by one hand on his stick, the other hand up to his brows to see better the murder of his people below. The wounded were howling; the dead were growing cold in twisted postures, muddy with the liquid mud of the thaw, here and there forming puddles with the inky patches of coal which reappeared beneath the tattered snow. And in the midst of these human corpses, all small, poor and lean in their wretchedness, lay Trompette's carcass, a monstrous and pitiful mass of dead flesh.

Etienne had not been killed. He was still waiting beside Catherine, who had fallen from fatigue and anguish, when a sonorous voice made him start. It was Abbé Ranvier, who was coming back after saying his Mass and who, with both arms in the air, with the inspired fury of a prophet, was calling the wrath of God down on the murderers. He foretold the era of justice, the approaching extermination of the middle class by fire from heaven, since it was bringing its crimes to a climax by massacring the workers and the disinherited of the world.

PART SEVEN

CHAPTER I

THE SHOTS FIRED at Montsou had reached as far as Paris with a formidable echo. For four days all the opposition journals had been indignant, displaying atrocious narratives on their front pages: twenty-five wounded, fourteen dead, including three women and two children. And there were prisoners taken as well; Levaque had become a sort of hero and was credited with a reply of antique sublimity to the examining magistrate. The empire, hit in mid-career by these few balls, affected the calm of omnipotence, without itself realizing the gravity of its wound. It was simply an unfortunate collision, something lost over there in the black country, very far from the Parisian boulevards which formed public opinion; it would soon be forgotten. The company had received an official intimation to hush up the affair and to put an end to a strike which from its irritating duration was becoming a social danger.

So on Wednesday morning three of the directors appeared at Montsou. The little town, sick at heart, which had not dared hitherto to rejoice over the massacre, now breathed again and tasted the joy of being saved. The weather, too, had become fine; there was a bright sun—one of those first February days which, with their moist warmth, tip the lilac shoots with green. All the shutters had been flung back at the administration building; the vast structure seemed alive again. And cheering rumors were circulating; it was said that the directors, deeply affected by the catastrophe, had rushed down to open their paternal arms to the wanderers from the settlements. Now that the blow had fallen—a more vigorous one, doubtless, than they had wished for—they were prodigal in their task of relief and decreed measures that were excellent though tardy. First of all they sent away the Borains and made much

of this extreme concession to their workmen. Then they put an end to the military occupation of the pits, which were no longer threatened by the crushed strikers. They also obtained silence regarding the sentinel who had disappeared from the Voreux; the district had been searched without finding either the gun or the corpse, and although there was a suspicion of crime, it was decided to consider the soldier a deserter. In every way they thus tried to attenuate matters, judging it dangerous to acknowledge the irresistible savagery of a crowd set free amid the falling structure of the old world. And, besides, this work of conciliation did not prevent them from bringing purely administrative affairs to a satisfactory conclusion, for Deneulin had been seen to return to the administration buildings, where he met M. Hennebeau. The negotiations for the purchase of Vandame continued, and it was considered certain that Deneulin would accept the company's offers.

But what particularly stirred the country were the great yellow posters which the directors had stuck up in profusion on the walls. On them were to be read these few lines in very large letters: "Workers of Montsou! We do not wish that the errors of which you have lately seen the sad effects should deprive sensible and willing workmen of their livelihood. We shall, therefore, reopen all the pits on Monday morning, and when work is resumed we shall examine with care and consideration those cases in which there may be room for improvement. We shall, in fact, do all that is just or possible to do." In one morning the ten thousand colliers passed before these placards. Not one of them spoke; many shook their heads; others went away with trailing steps, without changing one line in their motionless faces.

Up till now the settlement of the Deux-Cent-Quarante had persisted in its fierce resistance. It seemed that the blood of their mates, which had reddened the mud of the pit, was barricading the road against the others. Scarcely a dozen had gone down, merely Pierron and some sneaks of his sort, whose departure and arrival were gloomily watched without a gesture or a threat. Therefore, a deep suspicion greeted the placard stuck onto the church. Nothing was said about the returned certificates in that. Would the company refuse to take them on again? And the fear of retaliations, the fraternal idea of protesting against the dismissal of the more compromised men, made them all obstinate still. It was dubious; they would see. They would return to the pit when these gentlemen were good enough to put things plainly. Silence crushed the low houses. Hunger itself seemed nothing; all might die now that violent death had passed over their roofs.

But one house, that of the Maheus, remained especially black and mute in its overwhelming grief. Since she had followed her man to the cemetery, Maheude kept her teeth clenched. After the battle she had allowed Etienne to bring back Catherine, muddy and half dead, and as she was undressing her before the young man, in order to put her to bed, she thought for a moment that her daughter also had received a ball in the belly, for the chemise was marked with large patches of blood. But she soon understood that it was the flood of puberty, which was at last breaking out in the shock of this abominable day. Ah, another piece of luck, that wound! A fine present, to be

able to make children for the gendarmes to kill; and she never spoke to Catherine, nor did she, indeed, talk to Etienne. The latter slept with Jeanlin, at the risk of being arrested, seized by such horror at the idea of going back to the darkness of Réquillart that he would have preferred a prison. A shudder shook him, the horror of the night after all those deaths, an unacknowledged fear of the little soldier who slept down there underneath the rocks. Besides, he dreamed of a prison as of a refuge in the midst of the torment of his defeat, but they did not trouble him, and he dragged on his wretched hours, not knowing how to weary out his body. Only at times Maheude looked at both of them, at him and her daughter, with a spiteful air, as though she were asking them what they were doing in her house.

Once more they were all snoring in a heap. Father Bonnemort occupied the former bed of the two youngsters, who slept with Catherine now that poor Alzire no longer dug her hump into her big sister's ribs. It was when going to bed that the mother felt the emptiness of the house by the coldness of her bed, which was now too large. In vain she took Estelle to fill the vacancy; that did not replace her man, and she wept quietly for hours. Then the days began to pass by as before, always without bread, but yet without the luck to die outright; things picked up here and there rendered to the wretches the poor service of keeping them alive. Nothing had changed in their existence; only her man was gone.

On the afternoon of the fifth day Etienne, made miserable by the sight of this silent woman, left the room and walked slowly along the paved street of the settlement. The inaction which weighed on him impelled him to take constant walks, with arms swinging idly and lowered head, always tortured by the same thought. He tramped thus for half an hour, when he felt by an increase in his discomfort that his mates were coming to their doors to look at him. His little-remaining popularity had been driven to the winds by that fusillade, and he never passed now without meeting fiery looks which pursued him. When he raised his head there were threatening men there, women drawing aside the curtains from their windows, and beneath this still-silent accusation and the restrained anger of these eyes, enlarged by hunger and tears, he became awkward and could scarcely walk straight. These dumb reproaches seemed to be always increasing behind him. He became so terrified lest he should hear the entire settlement come out to shout its wretchedness at him that he returned, shuddering. But at the Maheus' the scene which met him still further agitated him. Old Bonnemort was near the cold fireplace, nailed to his chair ever since two neighbors, on the day of the slaughter, had found him on the ground with his stick broken, struck down like an old thunder-stricken tree. And while Lénore and Henri, to cajole their hunger, were scraping with deafening noise an old saucepan in which cabbages had been boiled the day before, Maheude, after having placed Estelle on the table, was standing up, threatening Catherine with her fist.

"Say that again, by God! Just dare to say that again!"

Catherine had declared her intention to go back to the Voreux. The idea of not gaining her bread, of being thus tolerated in her mother's house, like a

useless animal that is in the way, was becoming every day more unbearable; and if it had not been from the fear of Chaval she would have gone down on Tuesday.

She said again, stammering:

"What would you have? We can't go on doing nothing. We should get bread, anyhow."

Maheude interrupted her.

"Listen to me: the first one of you who goes to work, I'll do for you. No, that would be too much, to kill the father and go on taking it out of the children! I've had enough of it; I'd rather see you all put in your coffins, like him that's gone already."

And her long silence broke out into a furious flood of words. A fine sum that Catherine would bring her! Hardly thirty sous, to which they might add twenty sous if the bosses were good enough to find work for that brigand Jeanlin. Fifty sous and seven mouths to feed! The brats were only good to swallow soup. As to the grandfather, he must have broken something in his brain when he fell, for he seemed imbecile, unless it had turned his blood to see the soldiers firing at his mates.

"That's it, old man, isn't it? They've quite done for you. It's no good having your hands still strong; you're done for."

Bonnemort looked at her with his dim eyes without understanding. He remained for hours with fixed gaze, having no intelligence now except to spit into a plate filled with ashes, which was put beside him for cleanliness.

"And they've not settled his pension either," she went on. "And I'm sure they won't give it, because of our ideas. No! I tell you that we've had too much to do with those people who bring ill luck."

"But," Catherine ventured to say, "they promise on the placard—"

"Just let me alone with your damned placard! More birdlime for catching us and eating us. They can be mighty kind now that they have ripped us open."

"But where shall we go, Mother? They won't keep us at the settlement, sure enough."

Maheude made a vague, terrified gesture. Where should they go to? She did not know at all; she avoided thinking; it made her mad. They would go elsewhere—somewhere. And as the noise of the saucepan was becoming unbearable, she turned round on Lénore and Henri and boxed their ears. The fall of Estelle, who had been crawling on all fours, increased the disturbance. The mother quieted her with a push—a good thing if it had killed her! She spoke of Alzire; she wished the others might have that child's luck. Then suddenly she burst out into loud sobs with her head against the wall.

Etienne, who was standing by, did not dare to interfere. He no longer counted for anything in the house, and even the children drew back from him suspiciously. But the unfortunate woman's tears went to his heart, and he murmured:

"Come, come! Courage! We must try to get out of it."

She did not seem to hear him and was bemoaning herself now in a low, continuous complaint.

"Ah, the wretchedness! Is it possible? Things did go on before these horrors. We ate our bread dry, but we were all together, and what has happened, good God! What have we done then that we should have such troubles?—some under the earth and the others with nothing left but to long to get there too. It's true enough that they harnessed us like horses to work, and it's not at all a just sharing of things to be always getting the stick and making rich people's fortunes bigger without hope of ever tasting the good things. There's no pleasure in life when hope goes. Yes, that might have gone on longer; we might have breathed a bit. If we had only known! Is it possible to make oneself so wretched through wanting justice?"

Sighs swelled her breast, and her voice choked with immense sadness.

"Then there are always some clever people there who promise you that everything can be arranged by just taking a little trouble. Then one loses one's head and one suffers so much from things as they are that one asks for things that can't be. Now I was dreaming like a fool; I seemed to see a life of good friendship with everybody; I got off into the air, my faith, into the clouds! And then one breaks one's back when one tumbles down into the mud again. It's not true; there's nothing over there of the things that people tell of. What there is is only wretchedness; ah, wretchedness, as much as you like of it, and bullets into the bargain."

Etienne listened to this lamentation, and every tear struck him with remorse. He knew not what to say to calm Maheude, broken by her terrible fall from the heights of the ideal. She had come back to the middle of the room and was now looking at him; she addressed him with contemptuous familiarity in a last cry of rage:

"And you, do you talk of going back to the pit, too, after driving us out of the bloody place? I've nothing to reproach you with, but if I were in your shoes I should be dead of grief by now after causing such harm to the mates."

He was about to reply but then shrugged his shoulders in despair. What was the good of explaining?—for she would not understand in her grief. And he went away, for he was suffering too much, and resumed his wild walk outside.

There again he found the settlement apparently waiting for him, the men at the doors, the women at the windows. As soon as he appeared growls were heard and the crowd increased. The breath of gossip, which had been swelling for four days, was breaking out in a universal malediction. Fists were stretched toward him; mothers spitefully pointed him out to their boys; old men spat as they looked at him. It was the change which follows on the morrow of defeat, the fatal reverse of popularity, an execration exasperated by all the suffering endured without result. He had to pay for famine and death.

Zacharie, who came up with Philomène, hustled Etienne as he went out, grinning maliciously.

"Well, he gets fat. It's filling, then, to live on other people's deaths?"

The Levaque woman had already come to her door with Bouteloup. She spoke of Bébert, her youngster, killed by a bullet, and cried:

"Yes, there are cowards who get children murdered! Let him go and look for mine in the earth if he wants to give it me back!"

She was forgetting her man in prison, for the household was going on since Bouteloup remained, but she thought of him, however, and went on in a shrill voice:

"Get along! Rascals may walk about while good people are put away!"

In avoiding her Etienne tumbled onto Pierronne, who was running up across the gardens. She had regarded her mother's death as a deliverance, for the old woman's violence threatened to get them hanged; nor did she weep over Pierron's little girl, that streetwalker Lydie—a good riddance. But she joined in with her neighbors with the idea of gaining reconciliation.

"And my mother, eh, and the little girl? You've been seen; you were hiding yourself behind them when they caught the lead instead of you!"

What was to be done? Strangle Pierronne and the others and fight the whole settlement? Etienne wanted to do so for a moment. The blood was throbbing in his head; he now looked upon his mates as brutes; he was irritated to see them so unintelligent and barbarous that they wanted to revenge themselves on him for the logic of facts. How stupid it all was! And he felt disgust at his powerlessness to tame them again and satisfied himself with hastening his steps as though he were deaf to abuse. Soon it became a flight; every house hooted him as he passed; they hastened after his heels. It was a whole nation cursing him with a voice that was becoming like thunder in its overwhelming hatred. It was he, the exploiter, the murderer, who was the sole cause of their misfortune. He rushed out of the settlement, pale and terrified, with this yelling crowd behind his back. When he at last reached the main road most of them left him, but a few persisted, until at the bottom of the slope before the Avantage he met another group coming from the Voreux.

Old Mouque and Chaval were there. Since the death of his daughter Mouquette and of his son Mouquet, the old man had continued to act as groom without a word of regret or complaint. Suddenly, when he saw Etienne, he was shaken by fury; tears broke out from his eyes, and a flood of coarse words burst from his mouth, black and bleeding from his habit of chewing tobacco.

"You devil! You bloody swine! You filthy snout! Wait, you've got to pay me for my poor children; you'll have to come to it!"

He picked up a brick, broke it and threw both pieces.

"Yes! Yes! Clear him off!" shouted Chaval, who was grinning in excitement, delighted at this vengeance. "Everyone gets his turn; now you're stuck to the wall, you dirty hound!"

And he also attacked Etienne with stones. A savage clamor arose; they all took up bricks, broke them and threw them, to rip him open, as they would like to have done to the soldiers. He was dazed and could not flee; he faced them, trying to calm them with phrases. His old speeches, once so warmly received, came back to his lips. He repeated the words with which he had intoxicated them at the time when he could keep them in hand like a faithful

flock, but this power was dead, and only stones replied to him. He had just been struck on the left arm and was drawing back in great peril, when he found himself hemmed in against the front of the *Avantage*.

For the last few moments Rasseneur had been at his door.

"Come in," he said simply.

Etienne hesitated; it choked him to take refuge there.

"Come in; then I'll speak to them."

He resigned himself and took refuge at the other end of the parlor, while the innkeeper filled up the doorway with his broad shoulders.

"Look here, my friends, just be reasonable. You know very well that I've never deceived you. I've always been in favor of quietness, and if you had listened to me you certainly wouldn't be where you are now."

Rolling his shoulders and belly, he went on at length, allowing his facile eloquence to flow with the lulling gentleness of warm water. And all his old success came back; he regained his popularity naturally and without an effort, as if he had never been hooted and called a coward a month before. Voices arose in approval: "Very good! We are with you! That is the way to put it!" Thundering applause broke out.

Etienne, in the background, grew faint, and there was bitterness at his heart. He recalled Rasseneur's prediction in the forest, threatening him with the ingratitude of crowds. What imbecile brutality! What an abominable forgetfulness of old services! It was a blind force which constantly devoured itself. And beneath his anger at seeing these brutes spoil their own cause there was despair at his own fall and the tragic end of his ambition. What! Was it already done for? He remembered hearing beneath the beeches three thousand hearts beating to the echo of his own. On that day he had held his popularity in both hands. Those people belonged to him; he felt that he was their master. Mad dreams had then intoxicated him. Montsou at his feet, Paris beyond, becoming a deputy, perhaps, crushing the middle class in a speech, the first speech ever pronounced by a workman in a parliament. And it was all over! He awakened, miserable and detested; his people were dismissing him by flinging bricks.

Rasseneur's voice rose higher:

"Never will violence succeed; the world can't be remade in a day. Those who have promised you to change it all at one stroke are either making fun of you or they are rascals!"

"Bravo! Bravo!" shouted the crowd.

Who then was the guilty one? And this question which Etienne put to himself overwhelmed him more than ever. Was it, in fact, his fault, this misfortune which was making him bleed, the wretchedness of some, the murder of others, these women, these children, lean and without bread? He had had that lamentable vision one evening before the catastrophe. But then a force was lifting him; he was carried away with his mates. Besides, he had never led them; it was they who led him, who obliged him to do things which he would never have done if it were not for the shock of that crowd pushing behind him. At each new violence he had been stupefied by the course of

events, for he had neither foreseen nor desired any of them. Could he anticipate, for instance, that his followers in the settlement would one day stone him? These infuriated people lied when they accused him of having promised them an existence all fodder and laziness. And in this justification, in this reasoning, in which he tried to fight against his remorse, was hidden the anxiety that he had not risen to the height of his task; it was the doubts of the half-cultured man still perplexing him. But he felt himself at the end of his courage; he was no longer at heart with his mates; he feared this enormous mass of the people, blind and irresistible, moving like a force of nature, sweeping away everything, outside rules and theories. A certain repugnance was detaching him from them—the discomfort of his new tastes, the slow movement of all his being toward a superior class.

At this moment Rasseneur's voice was lost in the midst of enthusiastic shouts:

"Hurrah for Rasseneur! He's the fellow! Bravo, bravo!"

The innkeeper shut the door, while the band dispersed, and the two men looked at each other in silence. They both shrugged their shoulders. They finished up by having a drink together.

On the same day there was a great dinner at Piolaine; they were celebrating the betrothal of Négrel and Cécile. Since the previous evening the Grégoires had had the dining room waxed and the drawing room dusted. Mélanie reigned in the kitchen, watching over the roasts and stirring the sauces, the odor of which ascended to the attics. It had been decided that Francis, the coachman, should help Honorine to wait. The gardener's wife would wash up, and the gardener would open the gate. Never had the substantial, patriarchal old house been in such a state of gaiety.

Everything went off beautifully. Mme Hennebeau was charming with Cécile, and she smiled at Négrel when the Montsou lawyer gallantly proposed the health of the future household. M. Hennebeau was also very amiable. His smiling face struck the guests. The report circulated that he was rising in favor with the directors and that he would soon be made an officer of the Legion of Honor on account of the energetic manner in which he had put down the strike. Nothing was said about recent events, but there was an air of triumph in the general joy, and the dinner became the official celebration of a victory. At last then they were saved, and once more they could begin to eat and sleep in peace. A discreet allusion was made to those dead whose blood the Voreux mud had yet scarcely drunk up. It was a necessary lesson, and they were all affected when the Grégoires added that it was now the duty of all to go and heal the wounds in the settlements. They had regained their benevolent placidity, excusing their brave miners, whom they could already see again at the bottom of the mines, giving a good example of everlasting resignation. The Montsou notables, who had now left off trembling, agreed that this question of the wage system ought to be studied cautiously. The roasts came on, and the victory became complete when M. Hennebeau read a letter from the bishop, announcing Abbé Ranvier's removal. The middle

class throughout the province had been roused to anger by the story of this priest who treated the soldiers as murderers. And when the dessert appeared the lawyer resolutely declared that he was a freethinker. Deneulin was there with his two daughters. In the midst of the joy he forced himself to hide the melancholy of his ruin. That very morning he had signed the sale of his Vandame concession to the Montsou Company. With the knife at his throat he had submitted to the directors' demands, at last giving up to them that prey they had been on the watch for so long, scarcely obtaining from them the money necessary to pay off his creditors. He had even accepted, as a lucky chance, at the last moment their offer to keep him as divisional engineer, thus resigning himself to watch over, as a simple salaried servant, that pit which had swallowed up his fortune. It was the knell of small personal enterprises, the approaching disappearance of the masters, eaten up, one by one, by the ever-hungry ogre of capital, drowned in the rising flood of great companies. He alone paid the expenses of the strike; he understood that they were drinking to his disaster when they drank to M. Hennebeau's rosette. And he only consoled himself a little when he saw the fine courage of Lucie and Jeanne, who looked charming in their done-up toilets, laughing at the downfall, like happy tomboys disdainful of money.

When they passed into the drawing room for coffee M. Grégoire drew his cousin aside and congratulated him on the courage of his decision.

"What would you have? Your real mistake was to risk the million of your Montsou denier over Vandame. You gave yourself a terrible wound, and it has melted away in that dog's labor, while mine, which has not stirred from my drawer, still keeps me comfortably doing nothing, as it will keep my grandchildren's children."

CHAPTER II

ON SUNDAY Etienne escaped from the settlement at nightfall. A very clear sky, sprinkled with stars, lit up the earth with the blue haze of twilight. He went down toward the canal and followed the bank slowly in the direction of Marchiennes. It was his favorite walk, a grass-covered path two leagues long, passing straight beside this geometrical stream, which unrolled itself like an endless ingot of molten silver. He never met anyone there. But on this day he was vexed to see a man come up to him. Beneath the pale starlight the two solitary walkers only recognized each other when they were face to face.

"What! Is it you?" said Etienne.

Souvarine nodded his head without replying. For a moment they remained motionless, then side by side they set out toward Marchiennes. Each of them seemed to be continuing his own reflections, as though they were far away from each other.

"Have you seen in the paper about Pluchart's success at Paris?" asked Etienne at length. "After that meeting at Belleville they waited for him on

the pavement and gave him an ovation. Oh, he's afloat now, in spite of his sore throat. He can do what he likes in the future."

The engineman shrugged his shoulders. He felt contempt for fine talkers, fellows who go into politics as one goes to the bar, to get an income out of phrases.

Etienne was now studying Darwin. He had read fragments, summarized and popularized in a five-sou volume, and out of this ill-understood reading he had gained for himself a revolutionary idea of the struggle for existence, the lean eating the fat, the strong people devouring the pallid middle class. But Souvarine furiously attacked the stupidity of the Socialists who accept Darwin, that apostle of scientific inequality, whose famous selection was only good for aristocratic philosophers. His mate persisted, however, wishing to reason out the matter and expressing his doubts by a hypothesis: supposing the old society were no longer to exist, swept away to the crumbs; well, was it not to be feared that the new world would grow up again, slowly spoiled by the same injustices, some sick and others flourishing, some skillful and intelligent, fattening on everything, and others imbecile and lazy, becoming slaves again? But before this vision of eternal wretchedness the engineman shouted out fiercely that if justice were not possible with man, then man must disappear. For every rotten society there must be a massacre, until the last creature was exterminated. And there was silence again.

For a long time, with sunken head, Souvarine walked over the short grass, so absorbed that he kept to the extreme edge, by the water, with the quiet certainty of a sleepwalker on a roof. Then he shuddered causelessly, as though he had stumbled against a shadow. His eyes lifted and his face was very pale; he said softly to his companion:

"Did I ever tell you how she died?"

"Whom do you mean?"

"My wife, over there in Russia."

Etienne made a vague gesture, astonished at the tremor in his voice and at the sudden desire for confidence in this lad, who was usually so impassive in his stoical detachment from others and from himself. He only knew that the woman was his mistress and that she had been hanged at Moscow.

"The affair hadn't gone off," Souvarine said with eyes still vacantly following the white stream of the canal between the bluish colonnades of tall trees. "We had been a fortnight at the bottom of a hole undermining the railway, and it was not the imperial train that was blown up; it was a passenger train. Then they arrested Annutchka. She brought us bread every evening, disguised as a peasant woman. She lit the fuse, too, because a man might have attracted attention. I followed the trail, hidden in the crowd, for six long days."

His voice became thick, and he coughed as though he were choking.

"Twice I wanted to cry out and to rush over the people's heads to join her. But what was the good? One man less would be one soldier less, and I could see that she was telling me not to come when her large eyes met mine."

He coughed again.

"On the last day in the square I was there. It was raining; they stupidly

lost their heads, put out by the falling rain. It took twenty minutes to hang the other four. The cord broke; they could not finish the fourth. Annutchka was standing up, waiting. She could not see all; she was looking for me in the crowd. I got onto a post and she saw me, and our eyes never turned from each other. When she was dead she was still looking at me. I waved my hat; I came away."

There was silence again. The white road of the canal unrolled to the far distance, and they both walked with the same quiet step, as though each had fallen back into his isolation. At the horizon the pale water seemed to open the sky with a little hole of light.

"It was our punishment," Souvarine went on roughly. "We were guilty to love each other. Yes, it is well that she is dead; heroes will be born from her blood, and I no longer have any cowardice at my heart. Ah, nothing, neither parents nor wife nor friend! Nothing to make my hand tremble on the day when I must take others' lives or give up my own.

Etienne had stopped, shuddering in the cool night. He discussed no more; he simply said:

"We have gone far; shall we go back?"

They went back toward the Voreux slowly, and he added after a few paces:

"Have you seen the new placards?"

The company had that morning put up some more large yellow posters. They were clearer and more conciliatory, and the company undertook to take back the certificates of those miners who went down on the following day. Everything would be forgotten, and pardon was offered even to those who were most implicated.

"Yes, I've seen," replied the engineman.

"Well, what do you think of it?"

"I think that it's all up. The flock will go down again. You are all too cowardly."

Etienne feverishly excused his mates: a man may be brave; a mob which is dying of hunger has no strength. Step by step they were returning to the Voreux, and before the black mass of the pit he continued swearing that he, at least, would never go down, but he could forgive those who did. Then as the rumor ran that the carpenters had not had time to repair the tubbing, he asked for information. Was it true? Had the weight of the soil against the timber which formed the internal skirt of scaffolding to the shaft so pushed it in that the winding cages rubbed as they went down for a length of over fifty meters?

Souvarine, who once more became uncommunicative, replied briefly. He had been working the day before, and the cage did, in fact, jar; the enginemen had even had to double the speed to pass that spot. But all the bosses received any observations with the same irritating remark: it was coal they wanted; that could be repaired later on.

"You see that's smashing up!" Etienne murmured. "It will be a fine time!"

With eyes vaguely fixed on the pit in the shadow, Souvarine quietly concluded:

"If that does smash up the mates will know it, since you advise them to go down again."

Nine o'clock struck at the Montsou steeple, and his companion having said that he was going to bed, he added without putting out his hand:

"Well, good-by. I'm going away."

"What! You're going away?"

"Yes, I've asked for my certificate back. I'm going elsewhere."

Etienne, stupefied and affected, looked at him. After walking for two hours he said that to him! And in so calm a voice, while the mere announcement of this sudden separation made his own heart ache. They had got to know each other; they had toiled together; that always makes one sad, the idea of not seeing a person again.

"You're going away! And where do you go?"

"Over there—I don't know at all."

"But I shall see you again?"

"No, I think not."

They were silent and remained for a moment facing each other without finding anything to say.

"Then good-by."

"Good-by."

While Etienne ascended toward the settlement Souvarine turned and again went along the canal bank, and there, now alone, he continued to walk with sunken head, so lost in the darkness that he seemed merely a moving shadow of the night. Now and then he stopped; he counted the hours that struck afar. When he heard midnight strike he left the bank and turned toward the Voreux.

At that time the pit was empty, and he only met a sleepy-eyed captain. It was not until six o'clock that they would begin to get up steam to resume work. First he went to take from a cupboard a jacket which he pretended to have forgotten. Various tools—a drill armed with its screw, a small but very strong saw, a hammer and a chisel—were rolled up in this jacket. Then he left. But instead of going out through the shed he passed through the narrow corridor which led to the ladder passage. With his jacket under his arm he quietly went down without a lamp, measuring the depth by counting the ladders. He knew that the cage jarred at three hundred and seventy-four meters against the fifth row of the lower tubbing. When he had counted fifty-four ladders he put out his hand and was able to feel the swelling of the planking. It was there. Then with the skill and coolness of a good workman who has been reflecting over his task for a long time, he set to work. He began by sawing a panel in the brattice so as to communicate with the winding shaft. With the help of matches quickly lit and blown out, he was then able to ascertain the condition of the tubbing and of the recent repairs.

Between Calais and Valenciennes the sinking of mine shafts is surrounded by immense difficulties on account of the masses of subterranean water in great sheets at the level of the lowest valleys. Only the construction of tub-bings, frameworks jointed like the stays of a barrel, can keep out the springs

which flow in and isolate the shafts in the midst of the lakes, which with deep, obscure waves beat against the walls. It had been necessary in sinking the Voreux to establish two tubbings: that of the upper level, in the shifting sands and white clays bordering the chalky stratum and fissured in every part, swollen with water like a sponge; then that of the lower level, immediately about the coal stratum, in a yellow sand as fine as flour, flowing with liquid fluidity. It was here that the torrent was to be found, that subterranean sea so dreaded in the mine pits of the *nord*, a sea with its storms and its shipwrecks, an unknown and unfathomable sea, rolling its dark floods more than three hundred meters beneath the daylight. Usually the tubbings resisted the enormous pressure; the only thing to be dreaded was the piling up of the neighboring soil, shaken by the constant movement of the old galleries which were filling up. In this descent of the rocks lines of fracture were sometimes produced which slowly extended as far as the scaffolding, at last perforating it and pushing it into the shaft; and there was the great danger of a landslide and a flood filling the pit with an avalanche of earth and a deluge of springs.

Souvarine, sitting astride in the opening he had made, discovered a very serious defect in the fifth row of tubing. The wood was bellied out from the framework; several planks had even come out of their shoulder pieces. Abundant filtrations—*pitchoux*, the miners call them—were jetting out of the joints through the tarred oakum with which they were caulked. The carpenters, pressed for time, had been content to place iron squares at the angles, so carelessly that all the screws were not put in. A considerable movement was evidently going on behind in the sand of the torrent.

Then with his wimble he unscrewed the squares so that another push would tear them all off. It was a foolhardy task, during which he frequently only just escaped from falling headlong down the hundred and eighty meters which separated him from the bottom. He had been obliged to seize the oak guides, the joists along which the cages slid; and, suspended over the void, he traversed the length of the crossbeams with which they were joined from point to point, slipping along, sitting down, turning over, simply buttressing himself on an elbow or a knee with tranquil contempt of death. A breath would have sent him over, and three times he caught himself up without a shudder. First he felt with his hand and then worked, only lighting a match when he lost himself in the midst of these slimy beams. After loosening the screws he attacked the wood itself, and the peril became still greater. He had sought for the key, the piece which held the others; he attacked it furiously, making holes in it, sawing it, thinning it so that it lost its resistance, while through the holes and the cracks the water which escaped in small jets blinded him and soaked him in icy rain. Two matches were extinguished. They all became damp, and then there was night, the bottomless depth of darkness.

From this moment he was seized by rage. The breath of the invisible intoxicated him; the black horror of this rain-beaten hole urged him to mad destruction. He wreaked his fury at random against the tubing, striking where he could with his wimble, with his saw, seized by the desire to bring the whole thing at once down on his head. He brought as much ferocity to the task

as though he had been digging a knife into the skin of some execrated living creature. He would kill the Voreux at last, that evil beast with ever-open jaws which had swallowed so much human flesh! The bite of his tools could be heard; his spine lengthened; he crawled, climbed down, then up again, holding on by a miracle, in continual movement, the flight of a nocturnal bird amid the scaffolding of a belfry.

But he grew calm, dissatisfied with himself. Why could not things be done coolly? Without haste he took breath and then went back into the ladder passage, stopping up the hole by replacing the panel which he had sawed. That was enough; he did not wish to raise alarm by excessive damage which would have been repaired immediately. The beast was wounded in the belly; we should see if it were still alive at night. And he had left his mark; the frightened world would know that the beast had not died a natural death. He took his time in methodically rolling up his tools in his jacket and slowly climbed up the ladders. Then when he had emerged from the pit without being seen, it did not occur to him to go and change his clothes. Three o'clock struck. He remained standing on the road, waiting.

At the same hour Etienne, who was not asleep, was disturbed by a slight sound in the thick night of the room. He distinguished the low breath of the children and the snoring of Bonnemort and Maheude, while Jeanlin near him was breathing with a prolonged flutelike whistle. No doubt he had dreamed, and he was turning back when the noise began again. It was the creaking of a palliasse, the stifled effort of someone who was getting up. Then he imagined that Catherine must be ill.

"I say, is it you? What is the matter?" he asked in a low voice.

No one replied, and the snoring of the others continued. For five minutes nothing stirred. Then there was fresh creaking. Feeling certain this time that he was not mistaken, he crossed the room, putting his hands out in the darkness to feel the opposite bed. He was surprised to find the young girl sitting up, holding in her breath, awake and on the watch.

"Well! Why don't you reply? What are you doing then?"

At last she said:

"I'm getting up."

"Getting up at this hour?"

"Yes, I'm going back to work at the pit."

Etienne felt deeply moved and sat down on the edge of the palliasse, while Catherine explained her reasons to him. She suffered too much by living thus in idleness, feeling continual looks of reproach weighing on her; she would rather run the risk of being knocked about down there by Chaval. And if her mother refused to take her money when she brought it, well, she was big enough to act for herself and make her own soup.

"Go away; I want to dress. And don't say anything, will you, if you want to be kind?"

But he remained near her; he had put his arms round her waist in a caress of grief and pity. Pressed one against the other in their shirts, they could feel the warmth of each other's naked flesh at the edge of this bed, still moist with

night's sleep. She had at first tried to free herself; then she began to cry quietly, in her turn taking him by the neck to press him against her in a despairing clasp. And they remained, without any further desires, with the past of their unfortunate love, which they had not been able to satisfy. Was it then done with forever? Would they never dare to love each other someday now that they were free? It only needed a little happiness to dissipate their shame—that awkwardness which prevented them from coming together because of all sorts of ideas which they themselves could not read clearly.

"Go to bed again," she whispered. "I don't want to light up; it would wake Mother. It is time; leave me."

He could not hear; he was pressing her wildly, with a heart drowned in immense sadness. The need for peace, an irresistible need for happiness, was carrying him away, and he saw himself married, in a neat little house, with no other ambition than to live and to die there, both of them together. He would be satisfied with bread, and if there were only enough for one she should have it. What was the good of anything else? Was there anything in life worth more?

But she was unfolding her naked arms.

"Please leave me."

Then in a sudden impulse, he said in her ear:

"Wait, I'm coming with you."

And he was himself surprised at what he had said. He had sworn never to go down again; whence then came this sudden decision, arising from his lips without thought of his, without even a moment's discussion? There was now such calm within him, so complete a cure of his doubts, that he persisted like a man saved by chance, who has at last found the only harbor from his torment. So he refused to listen to her when she became alarmed, understanding that he was devoting himself for her and fearing the ill words which would greet him at the pit. He laughed at everything; the placards promised pardon, and that was enough.

"I want to work; that's my idea. Let us dress and make no noise."

They dressed themselves in the darkness with a thousand precautions. She had secretly prepared her miner's clothes the evening before; he took a jacket and breeches from the cupboard, and they did not wash themselves for fear of knocking the bowl. All were asleep, but they had to cross the narrow passage where the mother slept. When they started, as ill luck would have it, they stumbled against a chair. She woke and asked drowsily:

"Eh! What is it?"

Catherine had stopped, trembling and violently pressing Etienne's hand.

"It's me; don't trouble yourself," he said. "I feel stifled and am going outside to breathe a bit."

"Very well."

And Maheude fell asleep again. Catherine dared not stir. At last she went down into the parlor and divided a slice of bread and butter which she had reserved from a loaf given by a Montsou lady. Then they softly closed the door and went away.

Souvarine had remained standing near the *Avantage* at the corner of the road. For half an hour he had been looking at the colliers who were returning to work in the darkness, passing by with the dull tramp of a herd. He was counting them, as a butcher counts his beasts at the entrance to the slaughter-house, and he was surprised at their number; even his pessimism had not foreseen that the number of cowards would have been so great. The stream continued to pass by, and he grew stiff, very cold, with clenched teeth and bright eyes.

But he started. Among the men passing by, whose faces he could not distinguish, he had just recognized one by his walk. He came forward and stopped him.

"Where are you going to?"

Etienne, in surprise, instead of replying, stammered:

"What! You've not set out yet!"

Then he confessed he was going back to the pit. No doubt he had sworn, only it could not be called life to wait with crossed arms for things which would perhaps happen in a hundred years, and, besides, reasons of his own had decided him.

Souvarine had listened to him, shuddering. He seized him by the shoulder and pushed him toward the settlement.

"Go home again; I want you to. Do you understand?"

But Catherine having approached, he recognized her also. Etienne protested, declaring that he allowed no one to judge his conduct. And the engineman's eyes went from the young girl to her companion, while he stepped back with a sudden relinquishing movement. When there was a woman in a man's heart that man was done for; he might die. Perhaps he saw again in a rapid vision his mistress hanging over there at Moscow, that last link cut from his flesh, which had rendered him free of the lives of others and of his own life. He said simply:

"Go."

Etienne, feeling awkward, was delaying and trying to find some friendly word, so as not to separate in this manner.

"Then you're still going?"

"Yes."

"Well, give me your hand, old chap. A pleasant journey, and no ill feeling."

The other stretched out an icy hand. Neither friend nor wife.

"Good-by for good this time."

"Yes, good-by."

And Souvarine, standing motionless in the darkness, watched Etienne and Catherine entering the *Voreux*.

CHAPTER III

AT FOUR O'CLOCK the descent began. Dansaert, who was personally installed at the marker's office in the lamp cabin, wrote down the name of each worker

who presented himself and had a lamp given to him. He took them all without remark, keeping to the promise of the placards. When, however, he noticed Etienne and Catherine at the wicket, he started and became very red and was opening his mouth to refuse their names; then he contented himself with the triumph and a jeer. Ah! Ah! So the strong man was thrown? The company was, then, in luck since the terrible Montsou wrestler had come back to it to ask for bread? Etienne silently took his lamp and went toward the shaft with the putter.

But it was there, in the receiving room, that Catherine feared the mates' bad words. At the very entrance she recognized Chaval in the midst of some twenty miners, waiting till a cage was free. He came furiously toward her, but the sight of Etienne stopped him. Then he affected to sneer with an offensive shrug of the shoulders. Very good! He didn't care a hang, since the other had come to occupy the place that was still warm; good riddance! It only concerned the gentleman if he liked the leavings, and beneath the exhibition of this contempt he was again seized by a tremor of jealousy, and his eyes flamed. For the rest, the mates did not stir, standing silent, with eyes lowered. They contented themselves with casting a sidelong look at the newcomers; then, dejected and without anger, they again stared fixedly at the mouth of the shaft, with their lamps in their hands, shivering beneath their thin jackets in the constant drafts of this large room. At last the cage was wedged onto the keeps, and they were ordered to get in. Catherine and Etienne were squeezed in one tram, already containing Pierron and two pikemen. Beside them, in the other tram, Chaval was loudly saying to Father Mouque that the directors had made a mistake in not taking advantage of the opportunity to free the pits of the blackguards who were corrupting them, but the old groom, who had already fallen back into the doglike resignation of his existence, no longer grew angry over the death of his children and simply replied by a gesture of conciliation.

The cage freed itself and slipped down into the darkness. No one spoke. Suddenly, when they were in the middle third of the descent, there was a terrible jarring. The iron creaked, and the men were thrown onto each other.

"By God!" growled Etienne. "Are they going to flatten us? We shall end by being left here for good with their confounded tubbing. And they talk about having repaired it!"

The cage had, however, cleared the obstacle. It was now descending beneath so violent a rain, like a storm, that the workmen anxiously listened to the pouring. A number of leaks must then have appeared in the caulking of the joints.

Pierron, who had been working for several days, when asked about it, did not like to show his fear, which might be considered as an attack on the management, so he only replied:

"Oh, no danger! It's always like that. No doubt they've not had time to caulk the leaks."

The torrent was roaring over their heads, and they at last reached the pit eye beneath a veritable waterspout. Not one of the captains had thought of climbing up the ladders to investigate the matter. The pump would be enough;

the carpenters would examine the joints the following night. The reorganization of work in the galleries gave considerable trouble. Before allowing the pikemen to return to their hewing cells the engineer had decided that for the first five days all the men should execute certain works of consolidation which were extremely urgent. Landslips were threatening everywhere; the passages had suffered to such an extent that the timbering had to be repaired along a length of several hundred meters. Gangs of ten men were therefore formed below, each beneath the control of a captain. Then they were set to work at the most damaged spots. When the descent was complete it was found that three hundred and twenty-two miners had gone down, about half of those who worked there when the pit was in full swing.

Chaval belonged to the same gang as Catherine and Etienne. This was not by chance; he had at first hidden behind his mates and had then forced the captain's hand. This gang went to the end of the north gallery, nearly three kilometers away, to clear out a landslip which was stopping up a gallery in the Dix-Huit-Pouces seam. They attacked the fallen rocks with shovel and pick. Etienne, Chaval and five others cleared away the rubbish while Catherine, with the trammers, wheeled the earth up to the upbrow. They seldom spoke, and the captain never left them. The putter's two lovers, however, were on the point of coming to blows. While growling that he had had enough of this trollop, Chaval was still thinking of her and slyly hustling her about, so that Etienne had threatened to settle him if he did not leave her alone. They eyed each other fiercely and had to be separated.

Toward eight o'clock Dansaert passed to give a glance at the work. He appeared to be in a very bad humor and was furious with the captain; nothing had gone well. What was the meaning of such work? The planking would everywhere have to be done over again! And he went away, declaring that he would come back with the engineer. He had been waiting for Négrel since morning and could not understand the cause of this delay.

Another hour passed by. The captain had stopped the removal of the rubbish to employ all his people in supporting the roof. Even the putter and the two trammers left off wheeling to prepare and bring pieces of timber. At this end of the gallery the gang formed a sort of advance guard at the very extremity of the mine, now without communication with the other stalls. Three or four times strange noises, distant rushes, made the workers turn their heads to listen. What was it then? One would have said that the passages were being emptied and the mates already returning at a running pace. But the sound was lost in the deep silence, and they set to wedging their wood again, dazed by the loud blows of the hammer. At last they returned to the rubbish, and the wheeling began once more. Catherine came back from her first journey in terror, saying that no one was to be found at the upbrow.

"I called, but there was no reply. They've all cleared out of the place."

The bewilderment was so great that the ten men threw down their tools to rush away. The idea that they were abandoned, left alone at the bottom of the mine, so far from the pit eye, drove them wild. They only kept their lamps and ran in single file—the men, the boys, the putter—the captain himself

lost his head and shouted out appeals, more and more frightened at the silence in this endless desert of galleries. What then had happened that they did not meet a soul? What accident could thus have driven away their mates? Their terror was increased by the uncertainty of the danger, this threat which they felt there without knowing what it was.

When they at last came near the pit eye a torrent barred their road. They were at once in water to the knees and were no longer able to run, laboriously fording the flood with the thought that one minute's delay might mean death.

"By God! It's the tubbing that's given way," cried Etienne. "I said we should be left here for good."

Since the descent Pierron had anxiously observed the increase of the deluge which fell from the shaft. As with two others he loaded the trams, he raised his head, his face covered with large drops and his ears ringing with the roar of the tempest above. But he trembled especially when he noticed that the sump beneath him, that pit ten meters deep, was filling; the water was already spurting through the floor and covering the metal plates. This showed that the pump was no longer sufficient to fight against the leaks. He heard it panting with the groan of fatigue. Then he warned Dansaert, who swore angrily, replying that they must wait for the engineer. Twice he returned to the charge without extracting anything else but exasperated shrugs of the shoulder. Well, the water was rising; what could he do?

Mouque appeared with Bataille, whom he was leading to work, and he had to hold him with both hands, for the sleepy old horse had suddenly reared up and, with a shrill neigh, was stretching his head toward the shaft.

"Well, philosopher, what troubles you? Ah, it's because it rains. Come along, that doesn't concern you."

But the beast quivered all over his skin, and Mouque forcibly drew him to the haulage gallery.

Almost at the same moment as Mouque and Bataille were disappearing at the end of a gallery, there was a crackling in the air, followed by the prolonged noise of a fall. It was a piece of tubbing which had got loose and was falling a hundred and eighty meters down, rebounding against the walls. Pierron and the other porters were able to get out of the way, and the oak plank only smashed an empty tram. At the same time a mass of water, the leaping flood of a broken dike, rushed down. Dansaert proposed to go up and examine, but while he was still speaking another piece rolled down. And in terror before the threatening catastrophe, he no longer hesitated but gave the order to go up, sending captains to warn the men in their stalls.

Then a terrible hustling began. From every gallery rows of workers came rushing up, trying to take the cages by assault. They crushed madly against each other in order to be taken up at once. Some who had thought of trying the ladder passage came down again, shouting that it was already stopped up. That was the terror they all felt each time that the cage rose; this time it was able to pass, but who knew if it would be able to pass again in the midst of the obstacles obstructing the shaft? The downfall must be continuing above, for a series of low detonations was heard; the planks were splitting and burst-

ing amid the continuous and increasing roar of a storm. One cage soon became useless, broken in and no longer sliding between the guides, which were doubtless broken. The other jarred to such a degree that the cable would certainly break soon. And there remained a hundred men to be taken up, all panting, clinging to one another, bleeding and half drowned. Two were killed by falls of planking. A third, who had seized the cage, fell back fifty meters up and disappeared in the sump.

Dansaert, however, was trying to arrange matters in an orderly manner. Armed with a pick, he threatened to open the skull of the first man who refused to obey, and he tried to arrange them in file, shouting that the porters were to go up last after having sent up their mates. He was not listened to, and he had to prevent the pale and cowardly Pierron from entering among the first. At each departure he pushed him aside with a blow. But his own teeth were chattering; a minute more and he would be swallowed up; everything was smashing up there; a flood had broken loose, a murderous rain of scaffolding. A few men were still running up when, mad with fear, he jumped into a tram, allowing Pierron to jump in behind him. The cage rose.

At this moment the gang to which Etienne and Chaval belonged had just reached the pit eye. They saw the cage disappear and rushed forward, but they had to draw back from the final downfall of the tubbing; the shaft was stopped up, and the cage would not come down again. Catherine was sobbing, and Chaval was choked with shouting oaths. There were twenty of them; were those bloody bosses going to abandon them thus? Father Mouque, who had brought back Bataille without hurrying, was still holding him by the bridle, both of them stupefied, the man and the beast, in the face of this rapid flow of inundation. The water was already rising to their thighs. Etienne, in silence, with clenched teeth, supported Catherine between his arms. And the twenty yelled with their faces turned up, obstinately gazing at the shaft like imbeciles, that shifting hole which was belching out a flood and from which no help could henceforth come to them.

At the surface Dansaert, on arriving, perceived Négrel running up. By some fatality Mme Hennebeau had that morning delayed him on rising, turning over the leaves of catalogues for the purchase of wedding presents. It was ten o'clock.

"Well! What's happening then?" he shouted from afar.

"The pit is ruined," replied the head captain.

And he described the catastrophe in a few stammered words, while the engineer incredulously shrugged his shoulders. What! Could tubbing be demolished like that? They were exaggerating; he would make an examination.

"I suppose no one has been left at the bottom?"

Dansaert was confused. No, no one; at least, so he hoped. But some of the men might have been delayed.

"But," said Négrel, "what in the name of creation have you come up for then? You can't leave your men!"

He immediately gave orders to count the lamps. In the morning three hundred and twenty-two had been distributed, and now only two hundred and

fifty-five could be found, but several men acknowledged that in the hustling and panic they had dropped theirs and left them behind. An attempt was made to call over the men, but it was impossible to establish the exact number. Some of the miners had gone away; others did not hear their names. No one was agreed as to the number of the missing mates. It might be twenty, perhaps forty. And the engineer could only make out one thing with certainty: there were men down below, for their yells could be distinguished through the sound of the water and the fallen scaffolding on leaning over the mouth of the shaft.

Négrel's first care was to send for M. Hennebeau and to try to close the pit, but it was already too late. The colliers who had rushed to the Deux-Cent-Quarante settlement, as though pursued by the cracking tubbing, had frightened the families, and bands of women, old men and little ones came up running, shaken by cries and sobs. They had to be pushed back, and a line of overseers was formed to keep them off, for they would have interfered with the operations. Many of the men who had come up from the shaft remained there stupidly without thinking of changing their clothes, riveted by fear before this terrible hole in which they had nearly remained forever. The women, rushing wildly around them, implored them for names. Was So-and-So among them? And that one? And this other? They did not know, they stammered; they shuddered terribly and made gestures like madmen, gestures which seemed to be pushing away some abominable vision which was always present to them. The crowd rapidly increased, and lamentations arose from the roads. And up there on the pit bank, in Bonnemort's cabin, on the ground was seated a man, Souvarine, who had not gone away, who was looking on.

"The names! The names!" cried the women with voices choked by tears.

Négrel appeared for a moment and said hurriedly:

"As soon as we know the names they shall be given out, but nothing is lost so far: everyone will be saved. I am going down."

Then silent with anguish, the crowd waited. The engineer, in fact, with quiet courage was preparing to go down. He had had the cage unfastened, giving orders to replace it at the end of the cable by a tub, and as he feared that the water would extinguish his lamp, he had another fastened beneath the tub, which would protect it.

Several captains, trembling and with white, disturbed faces, assisted in these preparations.

"You will come with me, Dansaert," said Négrel abruptly.

Then when he saw them all without courage and that the head captain was tottering, giddy with terror, he pushed him aside with a movement of contempt.

"No, you will be in my way. I would rather go alone."

He was already in the narrow bucket, which swayed at the end of the cable, and holding his lamp in one hand and the signal cord in the other, he shouted to the engineman:

"Gently!"

The engine set the drums in movement, and Négrel disappeared in the gulf, from which the yells of the wretches below still arose.

At the upper part nothing had moved. He found that the tubbing here was in good condition. Balanced in the middle of the shaft he lit up the walls as he turned round; the leaks between the joints were so slight that his lamp did not suffer. But at three hundred meters, when he reached the lower tubbing, the lamp was extinguished, as he expected, for a jet had filled the tub. After that he was only able to see by the hanging lamp which preceded him in the darkness, and, in spite of his courage, he shuddered and turned pale in the face of the horror of the disaster. A few pieces of timber alone remained; the others had fallen in with their frames. Behind enormous cavities had been hollowed out, and the yellow sand, as fine as flour, was flowing in considerable masses, while the waters of the torrent, that subterranean sea with its unknown tempests and shipwrecks, were discharging in a flow like a weir. He went down lower, lost in the midst of these chasms which continued to multiply, beaten and turned round by the waterspout of the springs, so badly lit by the red star of the lamp moving on below, that he seemed to distinguish the roads and squares of some destroyed town far away in the play of the great moving shadows. No human work was any longer possible. His only remaining hope was to attempt to save the men in peril. As he sank down he heard the cries becoming louder, and he was obliged to stop; an impassable obstacle barred the shaft—a mass of scaffolding, the broken joists of the guides, the split brattices entangled with the metalwork torn from the pump. As he looked on for a long time with aching heart the yelling suddenly ceased. No doubt the rapid rise of the water had forced the wretches to flee into the galleries, if, indeed, the flood had not already filled their mouths.

Négrel resigned himself to pulling the signal cord as a sign to draw up. Then he had himself stopped again. He could not conceive the cause of this sudden accident. He wished to investigate it and examined those pieces of the tubbing which were still in place. At a distance the tears and cuts in the wood had surprised him. His lamp, drowned in dampness, was going out, and, touching with his fingers, he clearly recognized the marks of the saw and of the wimble—the whole abominable labor of destruction. Evidently this catastrophe had been intentionally produced. He was stupefied, and the pieces of timber, cracking and falling down with their frames in a last slide, nearly carried him with them. His courage fled. The thought of the man who had done that made his hair stand on end and froze him with a supernatural fear of evil, as though, mixed with the darkness, the man were still there, paying for his immeasurable crime. He shouted and shook the cord furiously, and it was, indeed, time, for he perceived that the upper tubbing, a hundred meters higher, was in its turn beginning to move. The joints were opening, losing their oakum caulking, and streams were rushing through. It was now only a question of hours before the tubbing would all fall down.

At the surface M. Hennebeau was anxiously waiting for Négrel.

"Well, what?" he asked.

But the engineer was choked and could not speak; he felt faint.

"It is not possible; such a thing was never seen. Have you examined?"

He nodded with a cautious look. He refused to talk in the presence of some captains who were listening and led his uncle ten meters away and, not thinking this far enough, drew still farther back; then in a low whisper he at last told of the outrage, the torn and sawed planks, the pit bleeding at the neck and groaning. Turning pale, the manager also lowered his voice with that instinctive need of silence in face of the monstrosity of great orgies and great crimes. It was useless to look as though they were trembling before the ten thousand Montsou men; later on they would see. And they both continued whispering, overcome at the thought that a man had had the courage to go down, to hang in the midst of space, to risk his life twenty times over in this terrible task. They could not even understand this mad courage in destruction; they refused to believe, in spite of the evidence, just as we doubt those stories of celebrated escapes of prisoners who fly through windows thirty meters above the ground.

When M. Hennebeau came back to the captains a nervous spasm was drawing his face. He made a gesture of despair and gave orders that the mine should be evacuated at once. It was a kind of funeral procession, in silent abandonment, with glances thrown back at those great masses of bricks, empty and still standing, but which nothing henceforth could save.

And as the manager and the engineer came down last from the receiving room the crowd met them with its clamor, repeating obstinately:

"The names! The names! Tell us the names!"

Maheude was now there among the women. She recollected the noise in the night; her daughter and the lodger must have gone away together, and they were certainly down at the bottom. And after having cried that it was a good thing, that they deserved to stay there, the heartless cowards, she had run up and was standing in the first row, trembling with anguish. Besides, she no longer dared to doubt; the discussion going on around her informed her as to the names of those who were down. Yes, yes, Catherine was among them, Etienne also—a mate had seen them. But there was not always agreement with regard to the others. No, not this one; on the contrary, that one; perhaps Chaval, with whom, however, a trammer declared that he had ascended. The Levaque and Pierronne, although none of their people were in danger, cried out and lamented as loudly as the others. Zacharie, who had come up among the first, in spite of his inclination to make fun of everything, had weepingly kissed his wife and mother and remained near the latter, quivering and showing an unexpected degree of affection for his sister, refusing to believe that she was below so long as the bosses made no authoritative statement.

"The names! The names! For pity's sake, the names!"

Négrel, who was exhausted, shouted to the overseers:

"Can't you make them be still? It's enough to kill one with vexation! We don't know the names!"

Two hours passed away in this manner. In the first terror no one had thought of the other shaft at the old Réquillart mine. M. Hennebeau was about to announce that the rescue would be attempted from that side when a rumor

ran round: five men had just escaped the inundation by climbing up the rotten ladders of the old unused passage, and Father Mouque was named. This caused surprise, for no one knew he was below. But the narrative of the five who had escaped increased the weeping; fifteen mates had not been able to follow them, having gone astray and been walled up by falls. And it was no longer possible to assist them, for there were already ten meters of water in Réquillart. All the names were known, and the air was filled with the groans of a slaughtered multitude.

"Will you make them be still?" Négrel repeated furiously. "Make them draw back! Yes, yes, to a hundred meters! There is danger; push them back, push them back!"

It was necessary to struggle against these poor people. They were imagining all sorts of misfortunes, and they had to be driven away so that the deaths might be concealed; the captains explained to them that the shaft would destroy the whole mine. This idea rendered them mute with terror, and they at last allowed themselves to be driven back step by step; the guards, however, who kept them back had to be doubled, for they were fascinated by the spot and continually returned. Thousands of people were hustling each other along the road; they were running up from all the settlements and even from Montsou. And the man above, on the pit bank, the fair man with the girlish face, smoked cigarettes to occupy himself, keeping his clear eyes fixed on the pit.

Then the wait began. It was midday; no one had eaten, but no one moved away. In the misty sky, of a dirty gray color, rusty clouds were slowly passing by. A big dog, behind Rasseneur's hedge, was barking furiously without cessation, irritated by the living breath of the crowd. And the crowd had gradually spread over the neighboring ground, forming a circle at a hundred meters round the pit. The Voreux arose in the center of the great space. There was not a soul there, not a sound; it was a desert. The windows and the doors, left open, showed the abandonment within; a forgotten red cat, divining the peril in this solitude, jumped from a staircase and disappeared. No doubt the stoves of the boilers were scarcely extinguished, for the tall brick chimney gave out a light smoke beneath the dark clouds, while the weathercock on the steeple creaked in the wind with a short, shrill cry, the only melancholy voice of these vast buildings which were about to die.

At two o'clock nothing had moved. M. Hennebeau, Négrel and other engineers who had hastened up formed a group in black coats and hats, standing in front of the crowd, and they, too, did not move away, though their legs were aching with fatigue and they were feverish and ill at their impotence in the face of such a disaster, only whispering occasional words as though at a dying person's bedside. The upper tubbing must nearly all have fallen in, for sudden echoing sounds could be heard as of deep, broken falls, succeeded by silence. The wound was constantly enlarging; the landslip which had begun below was rising and approaching the surface. Négrel was seized by nervous impatience; he wanted to see and he was already advancing alone into this awful void when he was seized by the shoulders. What was the good? He

could prevent nothing. An old miner, however, circumventing the overseers, rushed into the shed, but he quietly reappeared; he had gone for his sabots.

Three o'clock struck. Still nothing. A falling shower had soaked the crowd, but they had not withdrawn a step. Rasseneur's dog had begun to bark again. And it was at twenty minutes past three only that the first shock was felt. The Voreux trembled but continued solid and upright. Then a second shock followed immediately, and a long cry came from open mouths; the tarred screening shed, after having tottered twice, had fallen down with a terrible crash. Beneath the enormous pressure the structures broke and jarred each other so powerfully that sparks leaped out. From this moment the earth continued to tremble; the shocks succeeded one another, subterranean downfalls, the rumbling of a volcano in eruption. Afar the dog was no longer barking, but he howled plaintively as though announcing the oscillations which he felt coming, and the women, the children—all these people who were looking on—could not keep back a clamor of distress at each of these blows which shook them. In less than ten minutes the slate roof of the steeple fell in, the receiving room and the engine room were split open, leaving a considerable breach. Then the sounds ceased; the downfall stopped, and there was again deep silence.

For an hour the Voreux remained thus, broken into, as though bombarded by an army of barbarians. There was no more crying out; the enlarged circle of spectators merely looked on. Beneath the piled-up beams of the sifting shed fractured tipping cradles could be made out with broken and twisted hoppers. But the rubbish had especially accumulated at the receiving room, where there had been a rain of bricks, and large portions of wall and masses of plaster had fallen in. The iron scaffold which bore the pulleys had bent, half buried in the pit; a cage was still suspended; a torn cable end was hanging; then there was a hash of trams, metal plates and ladders. By some chance the lamp cabin remained standing, exhibiting on the left its bright rows of little lamps. And at the end of its disemboweled chamber the engine could be seen seated squarely on its massive foundation of masonry; its copper was shining, and its huge steel limbs seemed to possess indestructible muscles. The enormous crank, bent in the air, looked like the powerful knee of some giant quietly reposing in his strength.

After this hour of respite M. Hennebeau's hopes began to rise. The movement of the soil must have come to an end, and there would be some chance of saving the engine and the remainder of the buildings. But he would not yet allow anyone to approach, considering another half-hour's patience desirable. This waiting became unbearable; the hope increased the anguish, and all hearts were beating quickly. A dark cloud, growing large at the horizon, hastened the twilight, a sinister dayfall over this wreck of earth's tempests. Since seven o'clock they had been there without moving or eating.

And suddenly, as the engineers were cautiously advancing, a supreme convulsion of the soil put them to flight. Subterranean detonations broke out; a whole monstrous artillery was cannonading in the gulf. At the surface the last

buildings were tipped over and crushed. At first a sort of whirlwind carried away the rubbish from the sifting shed and the receiving room. Next the boiler buildings burst and disappeared. Then it was the low square tower, where the pumping engine was groaning, which fell on its face like a man mown down by a bullet. And then a terrible thing was seen: the engine, dislocated from its massive foundation, with broken limbs was struggling against death; it moved; it straightened its crank, its giant's knee, as though to rise, but, crushed and swallowed up, it was dying. The chimney alone, thirty meters high, still remained standing, though shaken, like a mast in the tempest. It was thought that it would be crushed to fragments and fly to powder, when suddenly it sank in one block, drunk down by the earth, melted like a colossal candle, and nothing was left, not even the point of the lightning conductor. It was done for; the evil beast crouching in this hole, gorged with human flesh, was no longer breathing with its thick, long respiration. The Voreux had been swallowed whole by the abyss.

The crowd rushed away, yelling. The women hid their eyes as they ran. Terror drove the men along like a pile of dry leaves. They wished not to shout and they shouted, with swollen breasts and arms in the air, before the immense hole which had been hollowed out. This crater, as of an extinct volcano, fifteen meters deep, extended from the road to the canal for a space of at least forty meters. The whole square of the mine had followed the buildings, the gigantic platforms, the footbridges with their rails, a complete train of trams, three wagons, without counting the wood supply, a forest of cut timber, gulped down like straw. At the bottom it was only possible to distinguish a confused mass of beams, bricks, iron, plaster, frightful remains, piled up, entangled, soiled in the fury of the catastrophe. And the hole became larger; cracks started from the edges, reaching afar, across the fields. A fissure ascended as far as Rasseneur's bar, and his front wall had cracked. Would the settlement itself pass into it? How far ought they to flee to reach shelter at the end of this abominable day, beneath this leaden cloud which also seemed about to crush the earth?

A cry of pain escaped Négrel. M. Hennebeau, who had drawn back, was in tears. The disaster was not complete; one bank of the canal gave way, and the canal emptied itself like one bubbling sheet through one of the cracks. It disappeared there, falling like a cataract down a deep valley. The mine drank down this river; the galleries would now be submerged for years. Soon the crater was filled and a lake of muddy water occupied the place where once stood the Voreux, like one of those lakes beneath which sleep accursed towns. There was a terrified silence, and nothing now could be heard but the fall of this water rumbling in the bowels of the earth.

Then on the shaken pit bank Souvarine rose up. He had recognized Maheude and Zacharie sobbing before this downfall, the weight of which was so heavy on the heads of the wretches who were in agony beneath. And he threw down his last cigarette; he went away, without looking back, into the now-dark night. Afar his shadow diminished and mingled with the darkness. He was going over there, to the unknown. He was going tranquilly to extermination,

wherever there may be dynamite to blow up towns and men. He will be there, without doubt, when the middle class, in agony, shall hear the pavement of the streets bursting up beneath their feet.

CHAPTER IV

ON THE NIGHT that followed the collapse of the Voreux M. Hennebeau started for Paris, wishing to inform the directors in person before the newspapers published the news. And when he returned on the following day he appeared to be quite calm, with his usual correct administrative air. He had evidently freed himself from responsibility; he did not appear to have decreased in favor. On the contrary, the decree appointing him officer of the Legion of Honor was signed twenty-four hours afterward.

But if the manager remained safe the company was tottering beneath the terrible blow. It was not the few million francs that had been lost; it was the wound in the flank, the deep, incessant fear of the morrow in face of this massacre of a mine. The company was so impressed that once more it felt the need of silence. What was the good of stirring up this abomination? If the villain were discovered, why make a martyr of him in order that his awful heroism might turn other heads and give birth to a long line of incendiaries and murderers? Besides, the real culprit was not suspected. The company came to think that there was an army of accomplices, not being able to believe that a single man could have had courage and strength for such a task, and it was precisely this thought which weighed on them, this thought of an ever-increasing threat to the existence of their mines. The manager had received orders to organize a vast system of espionage and then to dismiss quietly, one by one, the dangerous men who were suspected of having had a hand in the crime. They contented themselves with this method of purification—a prudent and politic method.

There was only one immediate dismissal, that of Dansaert, the head captain. Ever since the scandal at Pierronne's house he had become impossible. A pretext was made of his attitude in danger, the cowardice of a captain abandoning his men. This was also a prudent sop thrown to the miners, who hated him.

Among the public, however, many rumors had circulated, and the directors had to send a letter of correction to one newspaper, contradicting a story in which mention was made of a barrel of powder lit by the strikers. After a rapid inquiry the government inspector had concluded that there had been a natural rupture of the tubbing, occasioned by the piling up of the soil, and the company had preferred to be silent and to accept the blame of a lack of superintendence. In the Paris press after the third day the catastrophe had served to increase the stock of general news; nothing was talked of but the men perishing at the bottom of the mine, and the telegrams published every morning were eagerly read. At Montsou people grew pale and speechless at the very name of the Voreux, and a legend had formed which made the boldest tremble as they whispered it. The whole country showed great pity for the

victims; visits were organized to the destroyed pit, and whole families hastened up to shudder at the ruins which lay so heavily over the heads of the buried wretches.

Deneulin, who had been appointed divisional engineer, came upon the midst of the disaster on beginning his duties, and his first care was to turn the canal back into its bed, for this torrent increased the damage every hour. Extensive works were necessary, and he at once set a hundred men to construct a dike. Twice over the impetuosity of the stream carried away the first dams. Now pumps were set up and a furious struggle was going on; step by step the vanished soil was being violently reconquered.

But the rescue of the engulfed miners was a still more absorbing work. Négrel was appointed to attempt a supreme effort, and arms were not lacking to help him; all the colliers rushed to offer themselves in an outburst of brotherhood. They forgot the strike; they did not trouble themselves at all about payment; they might get nothing. They only asked to risk their lives as soon as there were mates in danger of death. They were all there with their tools, quivering as they waited to know where they ought to strike. Many of them, sick with fright after the accident, shaken by nervous tremors, soaked in cold sweats and the prey of continual nightmares, got up in spite of everything and were as eager as any in their desire to fight against the earth, as though they had a revenge to take on it. Unfortunately the difficulty began when the questions arose: What could be done? How could they go down? From what side could they attack the rocks?

Négrel's opinion was that not one of the unfortunate people was alive; the fifteen had surely perished, drowned or suffocated. But in these mine catastrophes the rule is always to assume that buried men are alive, and he acted on this supposition. The first problem which he proposed to himself was to decide where they could have taken refuge. The captains and old miners whom he consulted were agreed on one point: in the face of the rising water the men had certainly come up from gallery to gallery to the highest cuttings, so that they were, without doubt, driven to the end of the upper passages. This agreed with Father Mouque's information, and his confused narrative even gave reason to suppose that in the wild flight the band had separated into smaller groups, leaving fugitives on the road at every level. But the captains were not unanimous when the discussion of possible attempts at rescue arose. As the passages nearest to the surface were a hundred and fifty meters down, there could be no question of sinking a shaft. Réquillart remained the one means of access, the only point by which they could approach. The worst was that the old pit, now also inundated, no longer communicated with the Voreux, and above the level of the water only a few ends of galleries belonging to the first level were left free. The pumping process would require years, and the best plan would be to visit these galleries and ascertain if any of them approached the submerged passages at the end of which the distressed miners were suspected to be. Before logically arriving at this point much discussion had been necessary to dispose of a crowd of impracticable plans.

Négrel now began to stir up the dust of the archives; he discovered the old

plans of the two pits, studied them and decided on the points at which their investigations ought to be carried on. Gradually this hunt excited him; he was, in his turn, seized by a fever of devotion, in spite of his ironical indifference to men and things. The first difficulty was in going down at Réquillart; it was necessary to clear out the rubbish from the mouth of the shaft, to cut down the mountain ash and raze the sloes and the hawthorns; they had also to repair the ladders. Then they began to feel around. The engineer, having gone down with ten workmen, made them strike the iron of their tools against certain parts of the seam which he pointed out to them, and in deep silence they each placed an ear to the coal, listening for any distant blows to reply. But they went in vain through every practicable gallery; no echo returned to them. Their embarrassment increased. At what spot should they cut into the bed? Toward whom should they go, since no one appeared to be there? They persisted in seeking, however, notwithstanding the exhaustion produced by their growing anxiety.

On the first day Maheude came in the morning to Réquillart. She sat down on a beam in front of the shaft and did not stir from it till the evening. When a man came up she rose and questioned him with her eyes: Nothing? No, nothing! And she sat down again and waited still, without a word, with hard, fixed face. Jeanlin also, seeing that his den was invaded, prowled around with the frightened air of a beast of prey whose burrow will betray his booty. He thought of the little soldier lying beneath the rocks, fearing lest they should trouble his sound sleep, but that side of the mine was beneath the water, and, besides, their investigations were directed more to the left, in the west gallery. At first Philomène had also come, accompanying Zacharie, who was one of the gang; then she became wearied at catching cold, without need or result, and went back to the settlement, dragging through her days, a limp, indifferent woman, occupied from morning to night in coughing. Zacharie, on the contrary, lived for nothing else; he would have devoured the soil to get back his sister. At night he shouted out that he saw her; he heard her, very lean from hunger, her chest sore with calling for help. Since then he had tried to dig without orders, saying that it was there, that he was sure of it. The engineer would not let him come down any more, and he would not go away from the pit, from which he was driven off. He could not even sit down and wait near his mother; he was so deeply stirred by the need to act, which drove him constantly on.

It was the third day. Négrel, in despair, had resolved to abandon the attempt in the evening. At midday, after lunch, when he came back with his men to make one last effort, he was surprised to see Zacharie, red and gesticulating, come out of the mine, shouting:

"She's there! She's replied to me! Come along quickly!"

He had slid down the ladders, in spite of the watchman, and was declaring that he had heard hammering over there, in the first passage of the Guillaume seam.

"But we have already been twice in that direction," Négrel observed skeptically. "Anyhow, we'll go and see."

Maheude had risen and had to be prevented from going down. She waited, standing at the edge of the shaft, gazing down into the darkness of the hole.

Négrel, down below, himself struck three blows at long intervals. He then applied his ear to the coal, cautioning the workers to be very silent. Not a sound reached him, and he shook his head; evidently the poor lad was dreaming. In a fury Zacharie struck in his turn and listened anew with bright eyes and limbs trembling with joy. Then the other workmen tried the experiment, one after the other, and all grew animated, hearing the distant reply, very far away. The engineer was astonished; he again applied his ear and was at last able to catch a sound of aerial softness, a rhythmical roll scarcely to be distinguished, the well-known cadence beaten by the miners when they are fighting against the coal in the midst of danger. The coal transmits the sound with crystalline limpidity for a very great distance. A captain who was there estimated that the thickness of the block which separated them from their mates could not be less than fifty meters. But it seemed as if they could already stretch out a hand to them, and general gladness broke out. Négrel decided to begin at once the work of approach.

When Zacharie, up above, saw Maheude again they embraced each other.

"It won't do to get excited," Pierronne, who had come for a visit of inquisitiveness, was cruel enough to say. "If Catherine isn't there it would be such a grief afterward!"

That was true; Catherine might be somewhere else.

"Just leave me alone, will you? Damn it!" cried Zacharie in a rage. "She's there; I know it!"

Maheude sat down again in silence, with motionless face, continuing to wait.

As soon as the story was spread at Montsou a new crowd arrived. Nothing was to be seen, but they remained there all the same and had to be kept at a distance. Down below the work went on day and night. For fear of meeting an obstacle, the engineer had had three descending galleries opened in the seam, converging to the point where the enclosed miners were supposed to be. Only one pikeman could hew at the coal on the narrow face of the tube; he was relieved every two hours, and the coal piled in was passed up from hand to hand by a chain of men, increased as the hole was hollowed out. The work at first proceeded very quickly; they did six meters a day.

Zacharie had secured a place among the workers chosen for the hewing. It was a post of honor which was disputed over, and he became furious when they wished to relieve him after his two hours of regulation labor. He robbed his mates of their turn and refused to let go the pick. His gallery was soon in advance of the others. He fought against the coal so fiercely that his breath could be heard coming from the tube like the roar of a forge within his breast. When he came out, black and muddy, dizzy with fatigue, he fell to the ground and had to be wrapped up in a covering. Then still tottering, he plunged back again, and the struggle began anew—the low, deep blows, the stifled groans, the victorious fury of massacre. The worst was that the coal now became hard; he twice broke his tool and was exasperated that he could not get on so fast. He suffered also from the heat, which increased with every meter of

advance and was unbearable at the end of this narrow hole where the air could not circulate. A hand ventilator worked well, but aeration was so inadequate that on three occasions it was necessary to take out fainting hewers who were being asphyxiated.

Négrel lived below with his men. His meals were sent down to him, and he sometimes slept for a couple of hours on a truss of straw, rolled in a cloak. The one thing that kept them up was the supplication of the wretches beyond, the call which was sounded ever more distinctly to hasten on the rescue. It now rang very clearly with a musical sonority, as though struck on the plates of a harmonica. It led them on; they advanced to this crystalline sound as men advance to the sound of cannon in battle. Every time that a pikeman was relieved Négrel went down and struck, then applying his ear; and every time, so far, the reply had come, rapid and urgent. He had no doubt remaining; they were advancing in the right direction, but with what fatal slowness! They would never arrive soon enough. On the first two days they had indeed hewn through thirteen meters, but on the third day they fell to five and then on the fourth to three. The coal was becoming closer and harder, to such an extent that they now with difficulty struck through two meters. On the ninth day, after superhuman efforts, they had advanced thirty-two meters and calculated that some twenty must still be left before them. For the prisoners it was the beginning of the twelfth day; twelve times over had they passed twenty-four hours without bread, without fire, in that icy darkness! This awful idea moistened the eyelids and stiffened the arms of the workers. It seemed impossible that Christians could live longer. The distant blows had become weaker since the previous day, and every moment they trembled lest they should stop.

Maheude came regularly every morning to sit at the mouth of the shaft. In her arms she brought Estelle, who could not remain alone from morning to night. Hour by hour she followed the workers, sharing their hopes and fears. There was feverish expectation among the groups standing around, and even as far as Montsou, with endless discussion. Every heart in the district was beating down there beneath the earth.

On the ninth day, at the breakfast hour, no reply came from Zacharie when he was called for the relay. He was like a madman, working on furiously with oaths. Négrel, who had come up for a moment, was not there to make him obey, and only a captain and three miners were below. No doubt Zacharie, infuriated with the feeble vacillating light, committed the imprudence of opening his lamp, although severe orders had been given, for leakages of firedamp had taken place, and the gas remained in enormous masses in these narrow, unventilated passages. Suddenly a roar of thunder was heard, and a spout of fire darted out of the tube as from the mouth of a cannon charged with grape-shot. Everything flamed up, and the air caught fire like powder, from one end of the galleries to the other. This torrent of flame carried away the captain and three workers, ascended the pit and leaped up to the daylight in an eruption which hid the rocks and the ruins around. The inquisitive fled, and Maheude arose, pressing the frightened Estelle to her breast.

When Négrel and the men came back they were seized by a terrible rage.

They struck their heels on the earth as on a stepmother who was killing her children at random in the imbecile whims of her cruelty. They were devoting themselves; they were coming to the help of their mates, and still they must lose some of their men! After three long hours of effort and danger they reached the galleries once more, and the melancholy ascent of the victims took place. Neither the captain nor the workers were dead, but they were covered by awful wounds which gave out an odor of grilled flesh; they had drunk of fire; the burns had got into their throats, and they constantly moaned and prayed to be left alone. One of the three miners was the man who had smashed the pump at Gaston-Marie with a final blow of the shovel during the strike; the two others still had scars on their hands and grazed, torn fingers from the energy with which they had thrown bricks at the soldiers. The pale and shuddering crowd took off their hats when they were carried by.

Maheude stood waiting. Zacharie's body at last appeared. The clothes were burned; the body was nothing but black charcoal, calcined and unrecognizable. The head had been smashed by the explosion and no longer existed. And when these awful remains were placed on a stretcher Maheude followed them mechanically, her burning eyelids without a tear. With Estelle drowsily lying in her arms she went along, a tragic figure, her hair lashed by the wind. At the settlement Philomène seemed stupid; her eyes were turned into fountains, and she was quickly relieved. But the mother had already returned with the same step to Réquillart; she had accompanied her son; she was returning to wait for her daughter.

Three more days passed by. The rescue work had been resumed amid incredible difficulties. The galleries of approach had fortunately not fallen after the firedamp explosion, but the air was so heavy and so vitiated that more ventilators had to be installed. Every twenty minutes the pikemen relieved one another. They were advancing; scarcely two meters separated them from their mates. But now they worked, feeling cold at their hearts, striking hard only out of vengeance, for the noises had ceased and the low, clear cadence of the call no longer sounded. It was the twelfth day of their labors, the fifteenth since the catastrophe, and since the morning there had been a deathlike silence.

The new accident increased the curiosity at Montsou, and the inhabitants organized excursions with such spirit that the Grégoires decided to follow the fashion. They arranged a party, and it was agreed that they should go to the Voreux in their carriage, while Mme Hennebeau took Lucie and Jeanne there in hers. Deneulin would show them over his yards, and then they would return by Réquillart, where Négrel would tell them the exact state of things in the galleries and if there were still hope. Finally they would dine together in the evening.

When the Grégoires and their daughter Cécile arrived at the ruined mine, toward three o'clock, they found Mme Hennebeau already there in a sea-blue dress, protecting herself under her parasol from the pale February sun. The warmth of spring was in the clear sky. M. Hennebeau was there with Deneulin, and she was listening with listless ear to the account which the latter gave her of the efforts which had been made to dam up the canal. Jeanne, who always

carried a sketchbook with her, began to draw, carried away by the horror of the subject, while Lucie, seated beside her on the remains of a wagon, was crying out with pleasure and finding it awfully jolly. The incomplete dam allowed numerous leaks, and frothy streams fell in a cascade down the enormous hole of the engulfed mine. The crater was being emptied, however, and the water, drunk by the earth, was sinking and revealing the fearful ruin at the bottom. Beneath the tender azure of this beautiful day there lay a sewer, the ruins of a town drowned and melted in mud.

"And people come out of their way to see that!" exclaimed M. Grégoire, disillusioned.

Cécile, rosy with health and glad to breathe so pure an air, was cheerfully joking, while Mme Hennebeau made a little grimace of repugnance as she murmured:

"The fact is, this is not pretty at all."

The two engineers laughed. They tried to interest the visitors, taking them round and explaining to them the working of the pumps and the manipulation of the stamper which drove in the piles. But the ladies became anxious. They shuddered when they knew that the pumps would have to work for six or seven years before the shaft was reconstructed and all the water exhausted from the mine. No, they would rather think of something else; this destruction was only good to give bad dreams.

"Let us go," said Mme Hennebeau, turning toward her carriage.

Lucie and Jeanne protested. What, so soon? And the drawing which was not finished! They wanted to remain; their father would bring them to dinner in the evening. M. Hennebeau alone took his place with his wife in the carriage, for he wished to question Négrel.

"Very well! Go on before," said M. Grégoire. "We will follow you; we have a little visit of five minutes to make over there at the settlement. Go on, go on! We shall be at Réquillart as soon as you."

He got up behind Mme Grégoire and Cécile, and while the other carriage went along by the canal theirs gently ascended the slope.

Their excursion was to be completed by a visit of charity. Zacharie's death had filled them with pity for this tragical Maheu family, about whom the whole country was talking. They had no pity for the father, that brigand, that slayer of soldiers, who had to be struck down like a wolf. But the mother touched them, that poor woman who had just lost her son after having lost her husband and whose daughter was perhaps a corpse beneath the earth, to say nothing of an invalid grandfather, a child who was lame as the result of a landslide and a little girl who died of starvation during the strike. So that though this family had in part deserved its misfortunes by the detestable spirit it had shown, they had resolved to assert the breadth of their charity, their desire for forgetfulness and conciliation, by themselves bringing alms. Two parcels, carefully wrapped up, had been placed beneath a seat of the carriage.

An old woman pointed out to the coachman Maheude's house, number sixteen in the second block. But when the Grégoires alighted with the parcels they knocked in vain; at last they struck their fists against the door, still without

reply. The house echoed mournfully, like a house emptied by grief, frozen and dark, long since abandoned.

"There's no one there," said Cécile, disappointed. "What a nuisance! What shall we do with all this?"

Suddenly the door at the side opened, and the Levaque woman appeared.

"Oh, sir! I beg pardon, ma'am. Excuse me, miss. It's the neighbor that you want? She's not there; she's at Réquillart."

With a flow of words she told them the story, repeating to them that people must help one another and that she was keeping Lénore and Henri in her house to allow the mother to go and wait over there. Her eyes had fallen on the parcels, and she began to talk about her poor daughter who had become a widow, displaying her own wretchedness, while her eyes shone with covetousness. Then in a hesitating way she muttered:

"I've got the key. If the lady and gentleman would really like— The grandfather is there."

The Grégoires looked at her in stupefaction. What! The grandfather was there? But no one had replied. He was sleeping then? And when the Levaque made up her mind to open the door, what they saw stopped them on the threshold. Bonnemort was there alone, with large fixed eyes, nailed to his chair in front of the cold fireplace. Around him the room appeared larger without the clock or the polished deal furniture which formerly animated it; there only remained against the green crudity of the walls the portraits of the emperor and empress, whose rosy lips were smiling with official benevolence. The old man did not stir or wink his eyelids beneath the sudden light from the door; he seemed imbecile, as though he had not seen all these people come in. At his feet lay his plate, garnished with ashes, such as is placed for cats for ordure.

"Don't mind if he's not very polite," said the Levaque woman obligingly. "Seems he's broken something in his brain. It's a fortnight since he left off speaking."

But Bonnemort was shaken by some agitation, a deep scraping which seemed to arise from his belly, and he expectorated into the plate a thick black expectoration. The ashes were soaked into a coaly mud, all the coal of the mine which he drew from his chest. He had already resumed his immobility. He stirred no more, except at intervals, to spit.

Uneasy and with stomachs turned, the Grégoires endeavored to utter a few friendly and encouraging words.

"Well, my good man," said the father, "you have a cold then?"

The old man, with his eyes to the wall, did not turn his head. And a heavy silence fell once more.

"They ought to make you a little gruel," added the mother.

He preserved his mute stiffness.

"I say, Papa," murmured Cécile, "they certainly told us he was an invalid; only we did not think of it afterward—"

She interrupted herself, much embarrassed. After having placed on the table a *pot-au-feu* and two bottles of wine, she undid the second parcel and drew from it a pair of enormous boots. It was the present intended for the grand-

father, and she held one boot in each hand, in confusion, contemplating the poor man's swollen feet, which would never walk more.

"Eh! They come a little late, don't they, my worthy fellow?" said M. Grégoire again, to enliven the situation. "It doesn't matter; they're always useful."

Bonnemort neither heard nor replied, with his terrible face as cold and as hard as a stone.

Then Cécile furtively placed the boots against the wall. But in spite of her precautions the nails clanked, and those enormous boots stood oppressively in the room.

"He won't say thank you," said the Levaque woman, who had cast a look of deep envy on the boots. "Might as well give a pair of spectacles to a duck, asking your pardon."

She went on; she was trying to draw the Grégoires into her own house, where she hoped to gain their pity. At last she thought of a pretext; she praised Henri and Lénore, who were so good, so gentle and so intelligent, answering like angels the questions that they were asked. They would tell the lady and gentleman all that they wished to know.

"Will you come for a moment, my child?" asked the father, glad to get away.

"Yes, I'll follow you," she replied.

Cécile remained alone with Bonnemort. What kept her there, trembling and fascinated, was the thought that she seemed to recognize this old man. Where then had she met this square, livid face, tattooed with coal? Suddenly she remembered; she saw again a mob of shouting people who surrounded her, and she felt cold hands pressing her neck. It was he. She saw the man again; she looked at his hands placed on his knees, the hands of an invalid workman whose whole strength is in his wrists, still firm in spite of age. Gradually Bonnemort seemed to awake; he perceived her and examined her in his turn. A flame mounted to his cheeks; a nervous spasm drew his mouth, from which flowed a thin streak of black saliva. Fascinated, they remained opposite each other—she, flourishing, plump and fresh from the long idleness and sated comfort of her race; he, swollen with water, with the pitiful ugliness of a foundered beast, destroyed from father to son by a century of work and hunger.

At the end of ten minutes, when the Grégoires, surprised at not seeing Cécile, came back into the Maheus' house, they uttered a terrible cry. Their daughter was lying on the ground with livid face, strangled. At her neck fingers had left the red imprint of a giant's hand. Bonnemort, tottering on his dead legs, had fallen beside her without power to rise. His hands were still hooked, and he looked round with his imbecile air and large open eyes. In his fall he had broken his plate; the ashes were spread round; the mud of the black expectoration had stained the floor, while the great pair of boots, safe and sound, stood side by side against the wall.

It was never possible to establish the exact facts. Why had Cécile come near? How could Bonnemort, nailed to his chair, have been able to seize her throat? Evidently, when he held her, he must have become furious, constantly pressing,

overthrown with her and stifling her cries to the last groan. Not a sound, not a moan, had traversed the thin partition to the neighboring house. It seemed to be an outbreak of sudden madness, a longing to murder before this white young neck. Such savagery was stupefying in an old invalid who had lived like a worthy man, an obedient brute, opposed to new ideas. What rancor, unknown to himself, by some slow process of poisoning, had risen from his bowels to his brain? The horror of it led to the conclusion that he was unconscious, that it was the crime of an idiot.

The Grégoires, meanwhile, on their knees, were sobbing, choked with grief. Their idolized daughter, that daughter desired so long, on whom they had lavished all their goods, whom they used to watch sleeping, on tiptoe, whom they never thought sufficiently well nourished, never sufficiently plump! It was the downfall of their very life; what was the good of living now that they would have to live without her?

The Levaque woman in distraction cried:

"Ah, the old beggar! What's he done there? Who would have expected such a thing? And Maheude, who won't come back till evening! Shall I go and fetch her?"

The father and mother were crushed and did not reply.

"Eh? It will be better. I'll go."

But before going the Levaque woman looked at the boots. The whole settlement was excited, and a crowd was already hustling around. Perhaps they would get stolen. And then the Maheus had no man now to put them on. She quietly carried them away. They would just fit Bouteloup's feet.

At Réquillart the Hennebeaus, with Négrel, waited a long time for the Grégoires. Négrel, who had come up from the pit, gave details. They hoped to communicate that very evening with the prisoners, but they would certainly find nothing but corpses, for the deathlike silence continued. Behind the engineer, Maheude, seated on the beam, was listening with white face, when the Levaque woman came up and told her the old man's strange deed. And she only made a sweeping gesture of impatience and irritation. She followed her, however.

Mme Hennebeau was much affected. What an abomination! That poor Cécile, so merry that very day, so full of life an hour before! M. Hennebeau had to lead his wife for a moment into old Mouque's hovel. With his awkward hands he unfastened her dress, troubled by the odor of musk which her open bodice exhaled. And as with streaming tears she clasped Négrel, terrified at this death which cut short the marriage, the husband watched them lamenting together and was delivered from one anxiety. This misfortune would arrange everything; he preferred to keep his nephew for fear of his coachman.

CHAPTER V

AT THE BOTTOM OF THE SHAFT the abandoned wretches were yelling with terror. The water now came up to their hips. The noise of the torrent dazed them;

the final falling in of the tubbing sounded like the last crack of doom, and their bewilderment was completed by the neighing of the horses shut up in the stable, the terrible, unforgettable death cry of an animal that is being slaughtered.

Mouque had let go Bataille. The old horse was there, trembling, with its dilated eye fixed on this water which was constantly rising. The pit eye was rapidly filling; the greenish flood slowly enlarged under the red gleam of the three lamps which were still burning under the roof. And suddenly, when he felt this ice soaking his coat, he set out in a furious gallop and was engulfed and lost at the end of one of the haulage galleries.

Then there was a general rush, the men following the beast.

"Nothing more to be done in this damned hole!" shouted Mouque. "We must try at Réquillart."

The idea that they might get out by the old neighboring pit if they arrived before the passage was cut off now carried them away. The twenty hustled one another as they went in single file, holding their lamps in the air so that the water should not extinguish them. Fortunately the gallery rose with an imperceptible slope, and they proceeded for two hundred meters, struggling against the flood, which was not now gaining on them. Sleeping beliefs re-awakened in these distracted souls; they invoked the earth, for it was the earth that was avenging herself, discharging the blood from the vein because they had cut one of her arteries. An old man stammered forgotten prayers, bending his thumbs backward to appease the evil spirits of the mine.

But at the first turning disagreement broke out: the groom proposed turning to the left; others declared that they could make a short cut by going to the right. A minute was lost.

"Well, die there! What the devil does it matter to me?" Chaval brutally exclaimed. "I go this way."

He turned to the right, and two mates followed him. The others continued to rush behind Father Mouque, who had grown up at the bottom of Réquillart. He himself hesitated, however, not knowing where to turn. They lost their heads; even the old men could no longer recognize the passages, which lay like a tangled skein before them. At every bifurcation they were pulled up short by uncertainty, and yet they had to decide.

Etienne was running last, delayed by Catherine, who was paralyzed by fatigue and fear. He would have gone to the right with Chaval, for he thought that the better road, but he had not, preferring to part from Chaval. The rush continued, however; some of the mates had gone from their side, and only seven were left behind old Mouque.

"Hang onto my neck and I will carry you," said Etienne to the young girl, seeing her grow weak.

"No, let me be," she murmured. "I can't do more; I would rather die at once."

They delayed and were left fifty meters behind; he was lifting her, in spite of her resistance, when the gallery was suddenly stopped up; an enormous block fell in and separated them from the others. The inundation was already soaking

the soil, which was shifting on every side. They had to retrace their steps; then they no longer knew in what direction they were going. There was an end of all hope of escaping by Réquillart. Their only remaining hope was to gain the upper workings, from which they might, perhaps, be delivered if the water sank.

Etienne at last recognized the Guillaume seam.

"Good!" he exclaimed. "Now I know where we are. By God, we were in the right road, but we may go to the devil now! Here, let us go straight on; we will climb up the passage."

The flood was beating against their breasts, and they walked very slowly. As long as they had light they did not despair, and they blew out one of the lamps to economize the oil, meaning to empty it into the other lamp. They had reached the chimney passage when a noise behind made them turn. Was it some mates, then, who had also found the road barred and were returning? A roaring sound came from afar; they could not understand this tempest which approached them, spattering foam. And they cried out when they saw a gigantic whitish mass coming out of the shadow and trying to rejoin them between the narrow timbering in which it was being crushed.

It was Bataille. On leaving the pit eye he had wildly galloped along the dark galleries. He seemed to know his road in this subterranean town which he had inhabited for eleven years, and his eyes saw clearly in the depths of the eternal night in which he had lived. He galloped on and on, bending his head, drawing up his feet, passing through these narrow tubes in the earth, filled by his great body. Road succeeded to road, and the forked turnings were passed without any hesitation. Where was he going? Over there, perhaps, toward that vision of his youth, to the mill where he had been born on the bank of the Scarpe, to the confused recollection of the sun burning in the air like a great lamp. He desired to live; his beast's memory awoke; the longing to breathe once more the air of the plains drove him straight onward to the discovery of that hole, the exit beneath the warm sun into light. Rebellion carried away his ancient resignation; this pit was murdering him after having blinded him. The water which pursued him was lashing him on the flanks and biting him on the crupper. But as he went deeper in the galleries become narrower, the roofs lower, and the walls protruded. He galloped on in spite of everything, grazing himself, leaving fragments of his limbs on the timber. From every side the mine seemed to be pressing onto him to take him and to stifle him.

Then Etienne and Catherine, as he came near them, perceived that he was strangling between the rocks. He had stumbled and broken his two front legs. With a last effort he dragged himself a few meters, but his flanks could not pass; he remained hemmed in and garroted by the earth. With his bleeding head stretched out he still sought for some crack with his great troubled eyes. The water was rapidly covering him; he began to neigh with that terrible, prolonged death rattle with which the other horses had already died in the stable. It was a sight of fearful agony, this old beast fractured and motionless, struggling at this depth, far from the daylight. The flood was drowning his mane, and his cry of distress never ceased; he uttered it more hoarsely, with his

large open mouth stretched out. There was a last rumble, the hollow sound of a cask which is being filled, then deep silence fell.

"Oh, my God, take me away!" Catherine sobbed. "Ah, my God, I'm afraid, I don't want to die. Take me away! Take me away!"

She had seen death. The fallen shaft, the inundated mine, nothing had seized her with such terror as this clamor of Bataille in agony. And she constantly heard it; her ears were ringing with it; all her flesh was shuddering with it.

"Take me away! Take me away!"

Etienne had seized her and lifted her; it was, indeed, time. They ascended the chimney passage, soaked to the shoulders. He was obliged to help her, for she had no strength to cling to the timber. Three times over he thought that she was slipping from him and falling back into that deep sea, of which the tide was roaring beneath them. However, they were able to breathe for a few minutes when they reached the first gallery, which was still free. The water reappeared, and they had to hoist themselves up again. And for hours this ascent continued, the flood chasing them from passage to passage and constantly forcing them to ascend. At the sixth level a respite rendered them feverish with hope, and it seemed that the waters were becoming stationary. But a more rapid rise took place, and they had to climb to the seventh and then to the eighth level. Only one remained, and when they had reached it they anxiously watched each centimeter by which the water gained on them. If it did not stop they would then die like the old horse, crushed against the roof and their chests filled by the flood.

Landslips echoed every moment. The whole mine was shaken, and its distended bowels burst with the enormous flood which gorged them. At the end of the galleries the air, driven back, pressed together and crushed, exploded terribly amid split rocks and overthrown soil. It was a terrifying uproar of interior cataclysms, a remnant of the ancient battle when deluges overthrew the earth, burying the mountains beneath the plains.

And Catherine, shaken and dazed by this continuous downfall, joined her hands, stammering the same words without cessation:

"I don't want to die! I don't want to die!"

To reassure her Etienne declared that the water was not now moving. Their flight had lasted for fully six hours, and they would soon be rescued. He said six hours without knowing, for they had lost all count of time. In reality a whole day had already passed in their climb up through the Guillaume seam.

Drenched and shivering, they settled themselves down. She undressed herself without shame and wrung her clothes; then she put on again the jacket and breeches and let them finish drying on her. As her feet were bare, he made her take his own sabots. They could wait patiently now; they had lowered the wick of the lamp, leaving only the feeble gleam of a night light. But their stomachs were torn by cramp, and they both realized that they were dying of hunger. Up till now they had not felt that they were living. The catastrophe had occurred before breakfast, and now they found their bread and butter, swollen by the water and changed into sop. She had to become angry before he would accept his share. As soon as she had eaten she fell asleep from weariness.

ness on the cold earth. He was devoured by insomnia and watched over her with fixed eyes and forehead between his hands.

How many hours passed by thus? He would have been unable to say. All that he knew was that before him, through the hole they had ascended, he had seen the flood reappear, black and moving, the beast whose back was ceaselessly swelling out to reach them. At first it was only a thin line, a supple serpent stretching itself out; then it enlarged into a crawling, crouching flank, and soon it reached them, and the sleeping girl's feet were touched by it. In his anxiety he yet hesitated to wake her. Was it not cruel to snatch her from this repose of unconscious ignorance, which was, perhaps, lulling her with a dream of the open air and of life beneath the sun? Besides, where could they fly? And he thought and remembered that the upbrow established at this part of the seam communicated end to end with that which served the upper level. That would be a way out. He let her sleep as long as possible, watching the flood gain on them, waiting for it to chase them away. At last he lifted her gently, and a great shudder passed over her.

"Ah, my God, it's true! It's beginning again, my God!"

She remembered; she cried out, again finding death so near.

"No! calm yourself," he whispered. "We can pass, upon my word!"

To reach the upbrow they had to walk doubled up, again wet to the shoulders. And the climbing began anew, now more dangerous, through this hole entirely of timber, a hundred meters long. At first they wished to pull the cable so as to fix one of the carts below, for if the other should come down during their ascent they would be crushed. But nothing moved; some obstacle interfered with the mechanism. They ventured in, not daring to make use of the cable which was in their way and tearing their nails against the smooth framework. He came behind, supporting her by his head when she slipped with torn hands. Suddenly they came across the splinters of a beam which barred the way. A portion of the soil had fallen down and prevented them from going any higher. Fortunately a door opened here and they passed into a passage. They were stupefied to see the flicker of a lamp in front of them. A man cried wildly to them:

"More clever people as big fools as I am!"

They recognized Chaval, who had found himself blocked by the landslip which filled the upbrow; his two mates who had set out with him had been left on the way with fractured skulls. He was wounded in the elbow but had had the courage to go back on his knees, take their lamps and search them to steal their bread and butter. As he escaped a final downfall behind his back had closed the gallery.

He immediately swore that he would not share his victuals with these people who came up out of the earth. He would sooner knock their brains out. Then he, too, recognized them; his anger fell, and he began to laugh with a laugh of evil joy.

"Ah, it's you, Catherine! You've broken your nose and you want to join your man again. Well, well! we'll play out the game together."

He pretended not to see Etienne. The latter, overwhelmed by this encounter,

made a gesture as though to protect the putter, who was pressing herself against him. He must, however, accept the situation. Speaking as though they had left each other good friends an hour before, he simply asked:

"Have you looked down below? We can't pass through the cuttings then?"

Chaval still grinned.

"Ah, bosh! The cuttings! They've fallen in too; we are between two walls, a real mousetrap. But you can go back by the brow if you are a good diver."

The water, in fact, was rising; they could hear it rippling. Their retreat was already cut off. And he was right; it was a mousetrap, a gallery end obstructed before and behind by considerable falls of earth. There was not one issue; all three were walled up.

"Then you'll stay?" Chaval added jeeringly. "Well, it's the best you can do, and if you'll just leave me alone I shan't even speak to you. There's still room here for two men. We shall soon see which will die first, provided they don't come to us, which seems a tough job."

The young man said:

"If we were to hammer they would, perhaps, hear us."

"I'm tired of hammering. Here, try yourself with this stone."

Etienne picked up the fragment of sandstone which the other had already broken off, and against the seam at the end he struck the miner's call, the prolonged roll by which workmen in peril signal their presence. Then he placed his ear to listen. Twenty times over he persisted; no sound replied.

During this time Chaval affected to be coolly attending to his little household. First he arranged the three lamps against the wall; only one was burning; the others could be used later on. Afterward he placed on a piece of timber the two slices of bread and butter which were still left. That was the sideboard; he could last quite two days with that if he were careful. He turned round, saying:

"You know, Catherine, there will be half for you when you are famished."

The young girl was silent. It completed her unhappiness to find herself again between these two men.

And their awful life began. Neither Chaval nor Etienne opened their mouths, seated on the earth a few paces from each other. At a hint from the former the latter extinguished his lamp, a piece of useless luxury; then they sank back into silence. Catherine was lying down near Etienne, restless under the glances of her former lover. The hours passed by; they heard the low murmur of the water forever rising, while from time to time deep shocks and distant echoes announced the final settling down of the mine. When the lamp was empty and they had to open another to light it they were, for a moment, disturbed by the fear of firedamp, but they would rather have been blown up at once than live on in darkness. Nothing exploded, however; there was no firedamp. They stretched themselves out again, and the hours continued to pass by.

A noise aroused Etienne and Catherine, and they raised their heads. Chaval had decided to eat; he had cut off half a slice of bread and butter and was chewing it slowly, to avoid the temptation of swallowing it all. They gazed at him, tortured by hunger.

"Well, do you refuse?" he said to the putter in his provoking way. "You're wrong."

She had lowered her eyes, fearing to yield; her stomach was torn by such cramps that tears were swelling beneath her eyelids. But she understood what he was asking; in the morning he had breathed over her neck; he was seized again by one of his old furies of desire on seeing her near the other man. The glances with which he called her had a flame in them which she knew well, the flame of his crisis of jealousy when he would fall on her with his fists, accusing her of committing abominations with her mother's lodger. And she was not willing; she trembled, lest by returning to him she should throw these two men onto each other in this narrow cave, where they were all in agony together. Good God! Why could they not end together in comradeship!

Etienne would have died of inanition rather than beg a mouthful of bread from Chaval. The silence became heavy; an eternity seemed to be prolonging itself with the slowness of monotonous minutes which passed by, one by one, without hope. They had now been shut up together for a day. The second lamp was growing pale, and they lit the third.

Chaval started on his second slice of bread and butter and growled:

"Come then, stupid!"

Catherine shivered. Etienne had turned away in order to leave her free. Then as she did not stir, he said to her in a low voice:

"Go, my child."

The tears which she was stifling then rushed forth. She wept for a long time, without even strength to rise, no longer knowing if she were hungry, suffering with pain which she felt all over her body. He was standing up, going backward and forward, vainly beating the miner's call, enraged at this remainder of life which he was obliged to live here, tied to a rival whom he detested. Not even enough space to die away from each other! As soon as he had gone ten paces he must come back and knock up against this man. And she, this sorrowful girl whom they were disputing over even in the earth! She would belong to the one who lived longest; that man would steal her from him should he go first. There was no end to it; the hours followed the hours; the revolting promiscuity became worse, with the poison of their breaths and the ordure of their necessities satisfied in common. Twice he rushed against the rocks as though to open them with his fists.

Another day was done, and Chaval had seated himself near Catherine, sharing with her his last half slice. She was chewing the mouthfuls painfully; he made her pay for each with a caress, in his jealous obstinacy not willing to die until he had had her again in the other man's presence. She abandoned herself in exhaustion. But when he tried to take her she complained.

"Oh, leave me! You're breaking my bones."

Etienne, with a shudder, had placed his forehead against the timber so as not to see. He came back with a wild leap.

"Leave her, by God!"

"Does it concern you?" said Chaval. "She's my wife; I suppose she belongs to me!"

And he took her again and pressed her, out of bravado, crushing his red mustache over her mouth and continuing:

"Will you leave us alone, eh? Will you be good enough to look over there if we are at it?"

But Etienne, with white lips, shouted:

"If you don't let her go I'll do for you!"

The other quickly stood up, for he had understood by the hiss of the voice that his mate was in earnest. Death seemed to them too slow; it was necessary that one of them should immediately yield his place. It was the old battle beginning over again, down in the earth where they would soon sleep side by side, and they had so little room that they could not swing their fists without grazing them.

"Look out!" growled Chaval. "This time I'll have you."

From that moment Etienne became mad. His eyes seemed drowned in red vapor; his chest was congested by the flow of blood. The need to kill seized him irresistibly, a physical need, like the irritation of mucus which causes a violent spasm of coughing. It rose and broke out beyond his will, beneath the pressure of the hereditary disease. He had seized a sheet of slate in the wall, and he shook it and tore it out, a very large, heavy piece. Then with both hands and with tenfold strength he brought it down on Chaval's skull.

The latter had no time to jump backward. He fell, his face crushed, his skull broken. The brains had bespattered the roof of the gallery, and a purple jet flowed from the wound, like the continuous jet of a spring. Immediately there was a pool, which reflected the smoky star of the lamp. Darkness was invading the walled-up cave, and this body, lying on the earth, looked like the black boss of a mass of rough coal.

Leaning over with wide eyes, Etienne looked at him. It was done then; he had killed. All his struggles came back to his memory confusedly, that useless fight against the poison which slept in his muscles, the slowly accumulated alcohol of his race. He was, however, only intoxicated by hunger; the remote intoxication of his parents had been enough. His hair stood up before the horror of this murder, and yet in spite of the revolt which came from his education, a certain gladness made his heart beat, the animal joy of an appetite at length satisfied. He felt pride, too, the pride of the stronger man. The little soldier appeared before him with his throat opened by a knife, killed by a child. Now he, too, had killed.

But Catherine, standing erect, uttered a loud cry:

"My God! He is dead!"

"Are you sorry?" asked Etienne fiercely.

She was choking; she stammered. Then, tottering, she threw herself into his arms.

"Ah, kill me too! Ah, let us both die!"

She clasped him, hanging to his shoulders, and he clasped her, and they hoped that they would die. But death was in no hurry, and they unlocked their arms. Then while she hid her eyes he dragged away the wretch and threw him

down the upbrow, to remove him from the narrow space in which they still had to live. Life would no longer have been possible with that corpse beneath their feet. And they were terrified when they heard it plunge into the midst of the foam which leaped up. The water had already filled that hole then? They saw it; it was entering the gallery.

Then there was a new struggle. They had lit the last lamp; it was becoming exhausted in illuminating this floor, with its regular, obstinate rise which never ceased. At first the water came up to their ankles; then it wet their knees. The passage sloped up, and they took refuge at the end. This gave them a respite for some hours. But the flood caught them up and bathed them to the waist. Standing up, brought to bay with their spines close against the rock, they watched it, ever and ever increasing. When it should reach their mouths all would be over. The lamp, which they had fastened up, threw a yellow light on the rapid surge of the little waves. It was becoming pale; they could distinguish no more than a constantly diminishing semicircle, as though eaten away by the darkness which seemed to grow with the flood, and suddenly the darkness enveloped them. The lamp had gone out after having spit forth its last drop of oil. There was now complete and absolute night, that night of the earth which they would have to sleep through without ever again opening their eyes to the brightness of the sun.

"By God!" Etienne swore in a low voice.

Catherine, as though she had felt the darkness seize her, sheltered herself against him. She repeated in a whisper the miner's saying:

"Death is blowing out the lamp."

Yet in the face of this threat their instincts struggled; the fever of living animated them. He violently set himself to hollow out the slate with the hook of the lamp, while she helped him with her nails. They formed a sort of elevated bench, and when they had both hoisted themselves up to it they found themselves seated with hanging legs and bent backs, for the vault forced them to lower their heads. They now only felt the icy water at their heels, but before long the cold was at their ankles, their calves, their knees, with its invincible, truceless movement. The bench, not properly smoothed, was soaked in moisture and so slippery that they had to hold themselves on vigorously to avoid slipping off. It was the end; what could they expect, reduced to this niche where they dared not move, exhausted, starving, having neither bread nor light? And they suffered especially from the darkness, which would not allow them to see the coming of death. There was deep silence; the mine, being gorged with water, no longer stirred. They had nothing beneath them now but the sensation of that sea, swelling out its silent tide from the depths of the galleries.

The hours succeeded one another, all equally black, but they were not able to measure their exact duration, becoming more and more vague in their calculation of time. Their tortures, which might have been expected to lengthen the minutes, rapidly bore them away. They thought that they had only been shut up for two days and a night, when in reality the third day had already come to an end. All hope of help had gone; no one knew they were there; no one could come down to them. And hunger would finish them off if the in-

undation spared them. For one last time it occurred to them to beat the call, but the stone was lying beneath the water. Besides, who would hear them?

Catherine was leaning her aching head against the seam when she sat up with a start.

"Listen!" she said.

At first Etienne thought she was speaking of the low noise of the ever-rising water. He lied in order to quiet her.

"It's me you hear; I'm moving my legs."

"No, no; not that! Over there, listen!"

And she placed her ear to the coal. He understood and did likewise. They waited for some seconds with stifled breath. Then very far away and very weak, they heard three blows at long intervals. But they still doubted; their ears were ringing; perhaps it was the cracking of the soil. And they knew not what to strike with in answer.

Etienne had an idea.

"You have the sabots. Take them off and strike with the heels."

She struck, beating the miner's call, and they listened and again distinguished the three blows far off. Twenty times over they did it, and twenty times the blows replied. They wept and embraced each other at the risk of losing their balance. At last the mates were there; they were coming. An overflowing joy and love carried away the torments of expectation and the rage of their vain appeals, as though their rescuers had only to split the rock with a finger to deliver them.

"Eh!" she cried merrily. "Wasn't it lucky that I leaned my head?"

"Oh, you've got an ear!" he said in his turn. "Now, I heard nothing."

From that moment they relieved each other, one of them always listening, ready to answer at the least signal. They soon caught the sounds of the pick; the work of approaching them was beginning; a gallery was being opened. But their joy sank. In vain they laughed to deceive each other; despair was gradually seizing them. At first they entered into long explanations; evidently they were being approached from Réquillart. The gallery descended in the bed; perhaps several were being opened, for there were always three men hewing. Then they talked less and were at last silent when they came to calculate the enormous mass which separated them from their mates. They continued their reflections in silence, counting the days and days that a workman would take to penetrate such a block. They would never be reached soon enough; they would have time to die twenty times over. And no longer venturing to exchange a word in this redoubled anguish, they gloomily replied to the appeals by a roll of the sabots, without hope, only retaining the mechanical need to tell the others that they were still alive.

Thus passed a day, two days. They had been at the bottom six days. The water had stopped at their knees, neither rising nor falling, and their legs seemed to be melting away in this icy bath. They could certainly keep them out for an hour or so, but their position then became so uncomfortable that they were twisted by horrible cramps and were obliged to let their feet fall in again. Every ten minutes they hoisted themselves back by a jerk on the

slippery rock. The fractures of the coal struck into their spines, and they felt at the back of their necks a fixed, intense pain through having to keep constantly bent in order to avoid striking their heads. And their suffocation increased; the air, driven back by the water, was compressed into a sort of bell, in which they were shut up. Their voices were muffled and seemed to come from afar. Their ears began to buzz; they heard the peals of a furious tocsin, the tramp of a flock beneath a storm of hail, going on unceasingly.

At first Catherine suffered horribly from hunger. She pressed her poor shriveled hands against her breasts; her breathing was deep and hollow, a continuous tearing moan, as though tongs were tearing her stomach.

Etienne, choked by the same torture, was feeling feverishly round him in the darkness, when his fingers came upon a half-rotten piece of timber, which his nails could crumble. He gave a handful of it to the putter, who swallowed it greedily. For two days they lived on this worm-eaten wood, devouring it all, in despair when it was finished, grazing their hands in the effort to crush the other planks which were still solid with resisting fibers. Their torture increased, and they were enraged that they could not chew the cloth of their clothes. A leather girdle, which he wore round the waist, relieved them a little. He bit small pieces from it with his teeth, and she chewed them and endeavored to swallow them. This occupied their jaws and gave them the illusion of eating. Then when the girdle was finished they went back to their clothes, sucking them for hours.

But soon these violent crises subsided; hunger became only a low, deep ache with the slow, progressive languor of their strength. No doubt they would have succumbed if they had not had as much water as they desired. They merely bent down and drank from the hollow of the hand, and that very frequently, parched by a thirst which all this water could not quench.

On the seventh day Catherine was bending down to drink when her hand struck some floating body before her.

"I say, look! What's this?"

Etienne felt in the darkness.

"I can't make out; it seems like the cover of the ventilation door."

She drank, but as she was drawing up a second mouthful the body came back, striking her hand. And she uttered a terrible cry.

"My God! It's he!"

"Whom do you mean?"

"Him! You know well enough. I felt his mustache."

It was Chaval's corpse, risen from the upbrow and pushed on to them by the flow. Etienne stretched out his arm; he, too, felt the mustache and the crushed nose and shuddered with disgust and fear. Seized by horrible nausea, Catherine had spat out the water which was still in her mouth. It seemed to her that she had been drinking blood and that all the deep water before her was now that man's blood.

"Wait!" stammered Etienne. "I'll push him off!"

He kicked the corpse, which moved off. But soon they felt it again striking against their legs.

"By God! Get off!"

And the third time Etienne had to leave it. Some current always brought it back. Chaval would not go; he desired to be with them, against them. It was an awful companion, at last poisoning the air. All that day they never drank, struggling, preferring to die. It was not until the next day that their suffering decided them: they pushed away the body at each mouthful and drank in spite of it. It had not been worth while to knock his brains out, for he came back between him and her, obstinate in his jealousy. To the very end he would be there, even though he was dead, preventing them from coming together.

A day passed, and again another day. At every shiver of the water Etienne received a slight blow from the man he had killed, the simple elbowing of a neighbor who is reminding you of his presence. And every time it came he shuddered. He continually saw it there, swollen, greenish, with the red mustache and the crushed face. Then he no longer remembered; he had not killed him; the other man was swimming and trying to bite him.

Catherine was now shaken by long, endless fits of crying, after which she was completely prostrated. She fell at last into a condition of irresistible drowsiness. He would arouse her, but she stammered a few words and at once fell asleep again without even raising her eyelids; and fearing lest she should be drowned, he put his arm round her waist. It was he now who replied to the mates. The blows of the pick were now approaching; he could hear them behind his back. But his strength, too, was diminishing; he had lost all courage to strike. They were known to be there; why weary oneself more? It no longer interested him whether they came or not. In the stupefaction of waiting he would forget for hours at a time what he was waiting for.

One relief comforted them a little: the water sank, and Chaval's body moved off. For nine days the work of their deliverance had been going on, and they were for the first time taking a few steps in the gallery when a fearful commotion threw them to the ground. They felt for each other and remained in each other's arms like mad people, not understanding, thinking the catastrophe was beginning over again. Nothing more stirred; the sound of the picks had ceased.

In the corner where they were seated, holding each other, side by side, a low laugh came from Catherine.

"It must be good outside. Come, let's go out of here."

Etienne at first struggled against this madness. But the contagion was shaking his stronger head, and he lost the exact sensation of reality. All their senses seemed to go astray, especially Catherine's. She was shaken by fever, tormented now by the need to talk and move. The ringing in her ears had become the murmur of flowing water, the song of birds; she smelled the strong odor of crushed grass and could see clearly great yellow patches floating before her eyes, so large that she thought she was out of doors, near the canal, in the meadows on a fine summer day.

"Eh? How warm it is! Take me then; let us keep together. Oh, always, always!"

He pressed her, and she rubbed herself against him for a long time, continuing to chatter like a happy girl.

"How silly we have been to wait so long! I would have liked you at once, and you did not understand; you sulked. Then, do you remember, at our house at night, when we could not sleep, with our faces out, listening to each other's breathing, with such a longing to come together?"

He was won by her gaiety and joked over the recollection of their silent tenderness.

"You struck me once. Yes, yes, blows on both cheeks!"

"It was because I loved you," she murmured. "You see, I prevented myself from thinking of you. I said to myself that it was quite done with, and all the time I knew that one day or another we should get together. It only wanted an opportunity—some lucky chance. Wasn't it so?"

A shudder froze him. He tried to shake off this dream; then he repeated slowly:

"Nothing is ever done with; a little happiness is enough to make everything begin again."

"Then you'll keep me, and it will be all right this time?"

And she slipped down, fainting. She was so weak that her low voice died out. In terror he kept her against his heart.

"Are you in pain?"

She sat up, surprised.

"No, not at all. Why?"

But this question aroused her from her dream. She gazed at the darkness with distraction, wringing her hands in another fit of sobbing.

"My God, my God, how black it is!"

It was no longer the meadows, the odor of the grass, the song of larks, the great yellow sun; it was the fallen, inundated mine, the stinking gloom, the melancholy dripping of this cellar where they had been groaning for so many days. Her perverted senses now increased the horror of it; her childish superstitions came back to her; she saw the Black Man, the old dead miner who returns to the pit to twist naughty girls' necks.

"Listen! Did you hear?"

"No, nothing; I heard nothing."

"Yes, the Man—you know? Look! He is there. The earth has let all the blood out of the vein to revenge itself for being cut into, and he is there—you can see him—look! Blacker than night. Oh, I'm so afraid; I'm so afraid!"

She became silent, shivering. Then in a very low voice she whispered:

"No, it's always the other one."

"What other one?"

"Him who is with us, who is not alive."

The image of Chaval haunted her; she talked of him confusedly; she described the dog's life she led with him, the only day when he had been kind to her at Jean-Bart, the other days of follies and blows, when he would kill her with caresses after having covered her with kicks.

"I tell you that he's coming, that he will still keep us from being together!"

His jealousy is coming on him again. Oh, push him off! Oh, keep me, keep me close!"

With a sudden impulse she hung onto him, seeking his mouth and pressing her own passionately to it. The darkness lit up; she saw the sun again and she laughed a quiet laugh of love. He shuddered to feel her thus against his flesh, half naked beneath the tattered jacket and trousers, and he seized her with a reawakening of his virility. It was at length their wedding night, at the bottom of this tomb, on this bed of mud, the longing not to die before they had had their happiness, the obstinate longing to live and make live one last time. They loved each other in despair of everything in death.

After that there was nothing more. Etienne was seated on the ground, always in the same corner, and Catherine was lying motionless on his knees. Hours and hours passed by. For a long time he thought she was sleeping; then he touched her; she was very cold; she was dead. He did not move her, however, for fear of arousing her. The idea that he was the first who had possessed her as a woman and that she might be pregnant filled him with tenderness. Other ideas, the desire to go away with her, joy at what they would both do later on, came to him at moments, but so vaguely that it seemed only as though his forehead had been touched by a breath of sleep. He grew weaker; he only had strength to make a little gesture, a slow movement of the hand, to assure himself that she was certainly there, like a sleeping child in her frozen stiffness. Everything was being annihilated; the night itself had disappeared, and he was nowhere, out of space, out of time. Something was certainly striking beside his head; violent blows were approaching him, but he had been too lazy to reply, benumbed by immense fatigue, and now he knew nothing; he only dreamed that she was walking before him and that he heard the slight clank of her sabots. Two days passed; she had not stirred. He touched her with his mechanical gesture, reassured to find her so quiet.

Etienne felt a shock. Voices were sounding; rocks were rolling to his feet. When he perceived a lamp he wept. His blinking eyes followed the light; he was never tired of looking at it, enraptured by this reddish point which scarcely stained the darkness. But some mates carried him away, and he allowed them to introduce some spoonfuls of soup between his clenched teeth. It was only in the Riquillart gallery that he recognized someone standing before him, the engineer Négrel, and these two men, who felt contempt for each other—the rebellious workman and the skeptical master—threw themselves on each other's neck, sobbing loudly in the deep upheaval of all the humanity within them. It was immense sadness, the misery of generations, the extremity of grief to which life can fall.

At the surface Maheude, stricken down near dead Catherine, uttered a cry, then another, then another—very long, deep, incessant moans. Several corpses had already been brought up and placed in a row on the ground: Chaval, who was thought to have been crushed beneath a landslide, a trammer and two hewers, also crushed, with brainless skulls and bellies swollen with water. Women in the crowd went out of their minds, tearing their skirts and scratching their faces. When Etienne was at last taken out, after having been accus-

tomed to the lamps and fed a little, he appeared fleshless, and his hair was quite white. People turned away and shuddered at this old man. Maheude left off crying to stare at him stupidly with her large fixed eyes.

CHAPTER VI

IT WAS FOUR O'CLOCK in the morning, and the fresh April night was growing warm at the approach of day. In the limpid sky the stars were twinkling out, while the east grew purple with dawn. And a slight shudder passed over the drowsy black country, the vague rumor which precedes awakening.

Etienne, with long strides, was following the Vandame road. He had just passed six weeks at Montsou, in bed at the hospital. Though very thin and yellow, he felt strength to go, and he went. The company, still trembling for its pits, was constantly sending men away and had given him notice that he could not be kept on. He was offered the sum of one hundred francs, with the paternal advice to leave off working in mines, as it would now be too severe for him. But he refused the hundred francs. He had already received a letter from Pluchart, calling him to Paris and enclosing money for the journey. His old dream would be realized. The night before, on leaving the hospital, he had slept at the Bon-Joyeux, Widow Désir's. And he rose early; only one desire was left, to bid his mates farewell before taking the eight o'clock train at Marchiennes.

For a moment Etienne stopped on the road, which was now becoming rose-colored. It was good to breathe that pure air of the precocious spring. It would turn out a superb day. The sun was slowly rising, and the life of the earth was rising with it. And he set out walking again, vigorously striking with his brier stick, watching the plain afar as it rose from the vapors of the night. He had seen no one; Maheude had come once to the hospital and, probably, had not been able to come again. But he knew that the whole settlement of the Deux-Cent-Quarante was now going down at Jean-Bart and that she, too, had taken work there. Little by little the deserted roads were peopled, and colliers constantly passed Etienne with pallid, silent faces. After two and a half months of strike, when they had returned to the pits, conquered by hunger, they had been obliged to accept the timbering tariff, that disguised decrease in wages, now the more hateful because stained with the blood of their mates. They were being robbed of an hour's work; they were being made false to their oath never to submit, and this imposed perjury stuck in their throats like gall. Work was beginning again everywhere, at Mirou, at Madeleine, at Crève-cœur, at the Victoire. Everywhere in the morning haze, along the roads lost in darkness, the flock was tramping on, rows of men trotting with faces bent toward the earth, like cattle led to the slaughterhouse. They shivered beneath their thin garments, crossing their arms, rolling their hips, expanding their backs with the humps formed by the brick between the shirt and the jacket. And in this wholesale return to work, in these mute shadows, all black, without a laugh, without a look aside, one felt the teeth

clenched with rage, the hearts swollen with hatred, a simple resignation to the necessity of the belly.

The nearer Etienne approached the pit the more their number increased. They nearly all walked alone; those who came in groups were in single file, already exhausted, tired of one another and of themselves. He noticed one who was very old, with eyes that shone like hot coals beneath his livid forehead. Another, a young man, was panting with the restrained fury of a storm. Many had their sabots in their hands; one could scarcely hear the soft sound of their coarse woolen stockings on the ground. It was an endless rustling, a general downfall, the forced march of a beaten army, moving on with lowered heads, sullenly absorbed in the desire to renew the struggle and achieve revenge.

When Etienne arrived Jean-Bart was emerging from the shade; the lanterns hooked onto the platform were still burning in the growing dawn. Above the obscure buildings a trail of steam arose like a white plume delicately tinted with carmine. He passed up the sifting staircase to go to the receiving room.

The descent was beginning, and the men were coming from the shed. For a moment he stood by, motionless amid the noise and movement. The rolling of the trams shook the metal floor; the drums were turning, unrolling the cables in the midst of cries from the trumpet, the ringing of bells, blows of the mallet on the signal block; he found the monster again swallowing his daily ration of human flesh, the cages rising and plunging, engulfing their burden of men without ceasing, with the facile gulp of a voracious giant. Since his accident he had a nervous horror of the mine. The cages, as they sank down, tore his bowels. He had to turn away his head; the pit exasperated him.

But in the vast and still-somber hall, feebly lit up by the exhausted lanterns, he could perceive no friendly face. The miners, who were waiting there with bare feet and their lamps in their hands, looked at him with large restless eyes and then lowered their faces, drawing back with an air of shame. No doubt they knew him and no longer had any spite against him; they seemed, on the contrary, to fear him, blushing at the thought that he would reproach them with cowardice. This attitude made his heart swell; he forgot that these wretches had stoned him; he again began to dream of changing them into heroes, of directing a whole people, this force of nature which was devouring itself. A cage was embarking its men, and the batch disappeared; as others arrived he saw at last one of his lieutenants in the strike, a worthy fellow who had sworn to die.

"You too!" he murmured with aching heart.

The other turned pale and his lips trembled; then with a movement of excuse:

"What would you have? I've got a wife."

Now in the new crowd coming from the shed he recognized them all.

"You too! . . . You too! . . . You too!"

And all shrank back, stammering in choked voices:

"I have a mother." "I have children." "One must get bread."

The cage did not reappear; they waited for it mournfully, with such sorrow at their defeat that they avoided meeting each other's eyes, obstinately gazing at the shaft.

"And Maheude?" Etienne asked.

They made no reply. One made a sign that she was coming. Others raised their arms, trembling with pity. Ah, poor woman! What wretchedness! The silence continued, and when Etienne stretched out his hand to bid them farewell they all pressed it vigorously, putting into that mute squeeze their rage at having yielded, their feverish hope of revenge. The cage was there; they got into it and sank, devoured by the gulf.

Pierron had appeared with his naked captain's lamp fixed into the leather of his cap. For the past week he had been chief of the gang at the pit eye, and the men moved away, for promotion had rendered him bossy. The sight of Etienne annoyed him; he came up, however, and was at last reassured when the young man announced his departure. They talked. His wife now kept the *Estaminet du Progrès*, thanks to the support of all those gentlemen who had been so good to her. But he interrupted himself and turned furiously onto Father Mouque, whom he accused of not sending up the dung heap from his stable at the regulation hour. The old man listened with bent shoulders. Then before going down, suffering from this reprimand, he, too, gave his hand to Etienne with the same long pressure as the others, warm with restrained anger and quivering with future rebellion. And this old hand which trembled in his, this old man who was forgiving him for the loss of his dead children, affected Etienne to such a degree that he watched him disappear without saying a word.

"Then Maheude is not coming this morning?" he asked Pierron after a time.

At first the latter pretended not to understand, for there was ill luck even in speaking of her. Then as he moved away, under the pretext of giving an order, he said at last:

"Eh! Maheude? There she is."

In fact, Maheude had reached the shed with her lamp in her hand, dressed in trousers and jacket, with her head confined in the cap. It was by a charitable exception that the company, pitying the fate of this unhappy woman, so cruelly afflicted, had allowed her to go down again at the age of forty; and as it seemed difficult to set her again at haulage work, she was employed to manipulate a small ventilator which had been installed in the north gallery, in those infernal regions beneath Tartaret, where there was no movement of air. For ten hours, with aching back, she turned her wheel at the bottom of a burning tube, baked by forty degrees of heat. She earned thirty sous.

When Etienne saw her, a pitiful sight in her male garments—her breast and belly seeming to be swollen by the dampness of the cuttings—he stammered with surprise, trying to find words to explain that he was going away and that he wished to say good-by to her.

She looked at him without listening and said at last, speaking familiarly:

"Eh? It surprises you to see me. It's true enough that I threatened to wring the neck of the first of my children who went down again, and now that I'm

going down I ought to wring my own, ought I not? Ah well! I should have done it by now if it hadn't been for the old man and the little ones at the house."

And she went on in her low, fatigued voice. She did not excuse herself; she simply narrated things—that they had been nearly starved and that she had made up her mind to it, so that they might not be sent away from the settlement.

"How is the old man?" asked Etienne.

"He is always very gentle and very clean. But he is quite off his nut. He was not brought up for that affair, you know. There was talk of shutting him up with the madmen, but I was not willing; they would have done for him in his soup. His story has, all the same, been very bad for us, for he'll never get his pension; one of those gentlemen told me that it would be immoral to give him one."

"Is Jeanlin working?"

"Yes, those gentlemen found something for him to do at the top. He gets twenty sous. Oh, I don't complain; the bosses have been very good, as they told me themselves. The brat's twenty sous and my thirty, that makes fifty. If there were not six of us we should get enough to eat. Estelle devours now, and the worst is that it will be four or five years before Lénore and Henri are old enough to come to the pit."

Etienne could not restrain a movement of pain.

"They too!"

Maheude's pale cheeks turned red, and her eyes flamed. But her shoulders sank as if beneath the weight of destiny.

"What would you have? They after the others. They have all been done for there; now it's their turn."

She was silent; some landers, who were rolling trams, disturbed them. Through the large dusty windows the early sun was entering, drowning the lanterns in gray light, and the engine moved every three minutes; the cables unrolled; the cages continued to swallow down men.

"Come along, you loungers, look sharp!" shouted Pierron. "Get in; we shall never have done with it today."

Maheude, whom he was looking at, did not stir. She had already allowed three cages to pass, and she said, as though arousing herself and remembering Etienne's first words:

"Then you're going away?"

"Yes, this morning."

"You're right; better be somewhere else if one can. And I'm glad to have seen you, because you can know now, anyhow, that I've nothing on my mind against you. For a moment I could have killed you, after all that slaughter. But one thinks, doesn't one? One sees that when all's reckoned up it's nobody's fault. No, no! It's not your fault; it's the fault of everybody."

Now she talked with tranquillity of her dead, of her man, of Zacharie, of Catherine, and tears only came into her eyes when she uttered Alzire's name. She had resumed her calm reasonableness and judged things sensibly. It would

bring no luck to the middle class to have killed so many poor people. Sure enough, they would be punished for it one day, for everything has to be paid for. There would even be no need to interfere; the whole thing would explode by itself. The soldiers would fire on the masters just as they had fired on the men. And in her everlasting resignation, in that hereditary discipline under which she was again bowing, a conviction had established itself, the certainty that injustice could not last longer and that, if there were no good God left, another would spring up to avenge the wretched.

She spoke in a low voice, with suspicious glances round. Then as Pierron was coming up she added, aloud:

"Well, if you're going you must take your things from our house. There are still two shirts, three handkerchiefs and an old pair of trousers."

Etienne, with a gesture, refused these few things saved from the dealers.

"No, it's not worth while; they can be for the children. At Paris I can arrange for myself."

Two cages had once more gone down, and Pierron decided to speak straight to Maheude.

"I say now, over there, they are waiting for you! Is that little chat nearly done?"

But she turned her back. Why should he be so zealous, this man who had sold himself? The descent didn't concern him. His men hated him enough already on his level. And she persisted, with her lamp in her hand, frozen amid the drafts in spite of the mildness of the season. Neither Etienne nor she found anything more to say. They remained facing each other with hearts so full that they would like to speak once more.

At last she spoke for the sake of speaking.

"The Levaque is in the family way. Levaque is still in prison; Bouteloup is taking his place meanwhile."

"Ah yes! Bouteloup."

"And listen, did I tell you? Philomène has gone away."

"What! Gone away?"

"Yes, gone away with a Pas-de-Calais miner. I was afraid she would leave the two brats on me. But, no, she took them with her. Eh? A woman who spits blood and looks as if she were always swallowing her tongue!"

She mused for a moment and then went on in a slow voice:

"There's been talk on my account. You remember they said I slept with you. Lord! After my man's death that might very well have happened if I had been younger. But now I'm glad it wasn't so, for we should have regretted it, sure enough."

"Yes, we should have regretted it," Etienne repeated simply.

That was all; they spoke no more. A cage was waiting for her; she was being called angrily, threatened with a fine. Then she made up her mind and pressed his hand. Deeply moved, he still looked at her, so worn and worked out, with her livid face, her discolored hair escaping from the blue cap, her body as of a good, overfruitful beast, deformed beneath the jacket and trousers. And in this last pressure of the hands he felt again the long, silent pressure of his

mates, giving him a rendezvous for the day when they would begin again. He understood perfectly. There was a tranquil faith in the depths of her eyes. It would be soon, and that time it would be the final blow.

"A damned shammer!" exclaimed Pierron.

Pushed and hustled, Maheude squeezed into a tram with four others. The signal cord was drawn to strike for meat; the cage was unhooked and fell into the night, and there was nothing more but the rapid flight of the cable.

Then Etienne left the pit. Below, beneath the screening shed, he noticed a creature seated on the earth, with legs stretched out, in the midst of a thick pile of coal. It was Jeanlin, who was employed there to clean the large coal. He held a block of coal between his thighs and freed it with a hammer from the fragments of slate. A fine powder drowned him in such a flood of soot that the young man would never have recognized him if the child had not lifted his apeline face, with the protruding ears and small greenish eyes. He laughed with a joking air and, giving a final blow to the block, disappeared in the black dust which arose.

Outside Etienne followed the road for a while, absorbed in his thoughts. All sorts of ideas were buzzing in his head. But he felt the open air, the free sky, and he breathed deeply. The sun was appearing in glory at the horizon; there was a reawakening of gladness over the whole country. A flood of gold rolled from the east to the west in the immense plain. This heat of life was expanding and extending in a tremor of youth, in which vibrated the sighs of the earth, the song of birds, all the murmuring sounds of the waters and the woods. It was good to live, and the old world wanted to live through one more spring.

And penetrated by that hope, Etienne slackened his walk, his eyes wandering to right and to left amid the gaiety of the new season. He thought about himself; he felt himself strong, seasoned by his hard experiences at the bottom of the mine. His education was complete; he was going away armed, a rational soldier of the revolution, having declared war against society as he saw it and as he condemned it. The joy of rejoining Pluchart and of being, like Pluchart, a leader who was listened to, inspired him with speeches, and he began to arrange the phrases. He was meditating an enlarged program; that middle-class refinement, which had raised him above his class, had deepened his hatred of the middle class. He felt the need of glorifying these workers, whose odor of wretchedness was now unpleasant to him; he would show that they alone were great and stainless, the only nobility and the only strength in which humanity could be dipped afresh. He already saw himself in the tribune, triumphing with the people, if the people had not devoured him.

The loud song of a lark made him look up toward the sky. Little red clouds, the last vapors of the night, were melting in the limpid blue, and the vague faces of Souvarine and Rasseneur came to his memory. Decidedly all was spoiled when each man tried to get power for himself. Thus that famous International which was to have renewed the world had impotently miscarried, and its formidable army had been cut up and crumbled away from internal dissensions. Was Darwin right, then, and the world only a battlefield,

where the strong ate the weak for the sake of the beauty and continuance of the race? This question troubled him, although he settled it like a man who is satisfied with his knowledge. But one idea dissipated his doubts and enchanted him—that of taking up his old explanation of the theory the first time that he should speak. If any class must be devoured, would not the people, still new and full of life, devour the middle class, exhausted by enjoyment? The new society would arise from new blood. And in this expectation of an invasion of barbarians, regenerating the old decayed nations, reappeared his absolute faith in an approaching revolution, the real one—that of the workers—the fire of which would inflame this century's end with that purple of the rising sun which he saw like blood on the sky. He still walked, dreaming, striking his brier stick against the flints on the road, and when he glanced around him he recognized the various places. Just there, at the Fourche-aux-Bœufs, he remembered that he had taken command of the band that morning when the pits were sacked. Today the brutish, deathly, ill-paid work was beginning over again. Beneath the earth, down there at seven hundred meters, it seemed to him he heard low, regular, continuous blows; it was the men he had just seen go down, the black workers, who were hammering in their silent rage. No doubt they were beaten. They had left their dead and their money on the field, but Paris would not forget the volleys fired at the Voreux, and the blood of the empire, too, would flow from that incurable wound. And if the industrial crisis were drawing to an end, if the workshops were opening again one by one, a state of war was not less declared, and peace was henceforth impossible. The colliers had reckoned up their men; they had tried their strength, with their cry for justice arousing the workers all over France. Their defeat, therefore, reassured no one. The Montsou bourgeois, in their victory, felt the vague uneasiness that arises on the morrow of a strike, looking behind them to see if their end did not lie inevitably over there, in spite of all, beyond that great silence. They understood that the revolution would be born again unceasingly, perhaps tomorrow, with a general strike—the common understanding of all workers having general funds and so able to hold out for months, eating their own bread. This time a push only had been given to a ruinous society, but they had heard the rumbling beneath their feet and they felt more shocks arising and still more, until the old edifice would be crushed, fallen in and swallowed, going down like the Voreux to the abyss.

Etienne took the Joiselle road, to the left. He remembered that he had prevented the band from rushing on to Gaston-Marie. Afar, in the clear sky, he saw the steeples of several pits—Mirou to the right, Madeleine and Crève-cœur side by side. Work was going on everywhere; he seemed to be able to catch the blows of the pick at the bottom of the earth, striking now from one end of the plain to the other, one blow and another blow and yet more blows, beneath the fields and roads and villages which were laughing in the light, all the obscure labor of the underground prison, so crushed by the enormous mass of the rocks that one had to know it was underneath there to distinguish its great painful sigh. And he now thought that perhaps violence would not hasten things. Cutting cables, tearing up rails, breaking lamps, what a useless

task it was! It was not worth while for three thousand men to rush about in a devastating band doing that. He vaguely divined that lawful methods might one day be more terrible. His reason was ripening; he had sown the wild oats of his spite. Yes, Maheude had well said, with her good sense, that that would be the great blow—to organize quietly, to know one another, to unite in associations when the laws would permit it, then on the morning when they felt their strength and millions of workers would be face to face with a few thousand idlers, to take the power into their own hands and become the masters. Ah, what a reawakening of truth and justice! The sated and crouching god would at once get his deathblow, the monstrous idol hidden in the depths of his sanctuary, in that unknown distance where poor wretches fed him with their flesh without ever having seen him.

But Etienne, leaving the Vandame road, now came onto the paved street. On the right he saw Montsou, which was lost in the valley. Opposite were the ruins of the Voreux, the accursed hole where three pumps worked unceasingly. Then there were the other pits at the horizon, the Victoire, St Thomas, Feutry-Cantel, while toward the north the tall chimneys of the blast furnaces and the batteries of coke ovens were smoking in the transparent morning air. If he were not to lose the eight o'clock train he must hasten, for he had still six kilometers before him.

And beneath his feet the deep blows, those obstinate blows of the pick, continued. The mates were all there; he heard them following him at every stride. Was not that Maheude beneath the beetroots, with bent back and hoarse respiration accompanying the rumble of the ventilator? To left, to right, farther on, he seemed to recognize others beneath the wheat fields, the hedges, the young trees. Now the April sun in the open sky was shining in his glory and warming the pregnant earth. From its fertile flanks life was leaping out; buds were bursting into green leaves, and the fields were quivering with the growth of the grass. On every side seeds were swelling, stretching out, cracking the plain, filled by the need of heat and light. An overflow of sap was mixed with whispering voices, the sound of the germs expanding in a great kiss. Again and again, more and more distinctly, as though they were approaching the soil, the mates were hammering. In the heated rays of the sun on this youthful morning the country seemed full of that sound. Men were springing forth, a black avenging army, germinating slowly in the furrows, growing toward the harvests of the next century, and this germination would soon overturn the earth.

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